Allen Leske Interview
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301 O'Dowd Hall
Oakland University
Transcribed by Daniel Clark

DC: I start out with the most basic of all questions—where were you born?

AL: Detroit, Michigan.

DC: Detroit, OK.

AL: Lived in the same house for twenty—about twenty, twenty years.

DC: Where in Detroit was this?

AL: Off of Six Mile and Van Dyke.

DC: OK.

AL: Right by the factory where I worked, in fact.

DC: Oh really, OK. Which factory was that.

AL: It was—well, we had different names. It was Gear and Axle, and Detroit Ford. It kept on changing names on us.

DC: OK, but it started out Gear and Axle?

AL: Gear and Axle plant.

DC: And then it changed to Detroit . . .

AL: Ford's was behind us. They merged. Detroit Ford and Gear and Axle came together for awhile, then they split again. It was part of, all Chrysler's though.

DC: If you don't mind me asking, when were you born?

AL: June 4, 1942.

DC: OK. Had your parents lived in Detroit for long?

AL: Yes, yeah. They bought the house back in 1940, right before the war, about '41, around that time.

DC: Where had they lived before that?

AL: Oh, I couldn't tell you. I wouldn't know, actually, where they lived. All my life was that house. I think they got—in fact I think they got married and that's the first house they owned.

DC: OK, when they married that was their first house.

AL: Yeah. My mother didn't like the house. I remember that story.

DC: Really, why didn't she like the house?

AL: Oh, my Dad bought it without asking her or nothing, and they moved in. But they were there for, oh, it had to be thirty years or so.

DC: Really, OK. So you were there for twenty, and then they stayed on.

AL: Oh, from 1941 to—see, the house blew up back when we was married, about in the late '60s, '70s.

DC: You say it blew up?

AL: Yeah.

DC: What do you mean?

AL: Well, my mother—my father passed away, and my mother was an invalid. She came to live with us, so we took the house and rented it out on option for the woman to buy. Well her brother came and stayed with her at the house and stuff, and I guess he had the stove going. He left the house early in the morning, and the pilot wasn't lit, and just the gas built up, and he walked in with a cigarette, and blew it, blew it right up.

DC: Goodness gracious. Did someone get hurt there?

AL: He got hurt a little—burnt a little bit, and stuff. But nothing, you know—I don't know how serious. But the house was destroyed.

DC: Oh my goodness.

AL: And a good thing, my mother kept the insurance on the house, because she didn't have insurance. So my mother had enough money—to get some money from the insurance, and had the house tore down then. So it was a blessing that we kept the insurance.

DC: Yeah I guess so. Were your parents from Detroit?

AL: Well, yeah, around the Detroit area. My grandfather used to live on—let's see, it was, uh—Mt. Elliott. They were living on Mt. Elliott for awhile. Then he bought a farm out in Plymouth, Michigan. So they went out there, and my grandmother lived in Hamtramck, my other grandmother—my Dad's side.

DC: OK, let's see. Where did your father work?

AL: Well he started out at Midland Steel, on Mt. Elliott.

DC: Melland Steel?

AL: Midland Steel?

DC: Midland Steel, OK, got it.

AL: And they were making frames for cars at that time.

DC: Do you know when he started working there?

AL: No. It was—he had a lot of years in there and stuff, and they had the Union, which all I could—the Union started up in there, and I guess, what I understand, when he bought—the union bought the Union Hall, they put it in the Company's name. But when the Company closed down, they took the Union Hall with them and sold it, from the workers.

DC: Wow. That's an interesting mix-up there.

AL: Yeah.

DC: What about your mother? What did . . .

AL: She was just a house—just a housewife—took care of us kids. I remember every Friday she used to tear the house apart cleaning. Oh, I remember all of a sudden, curtains coming down, and the washing. Old Polish style.

DC: Oh, OK, her family was Polish then?

AL: Yeah, well, we're a mix of a lot of everything, but I always call myself Polish. And my grandmother, the other grandmother lived in Hamtramck, so . . .

DC: So what were the different backgrounds? You said you're a mix of a lot of different things.

AL: I understand a little German in us, and a lot of different generations is different stuff.

DC: Had your grandparents been born in the United States.

AL: Kim [daughter] could tell you. I don't know. She checked all that out, and she's doing the family tree and stuff. But my parents, my parents were born here. My grandparents, I don't know if they were from overseas, or here or what.

DC: OK. Yeah. Well what can you tell me about growing up at Six Mile and Van Dyke? What was the . . .

AL: Well we're at—actually it was Lynch Road and Van Dyke, right where the factory is. Lynch Road and Van Dyke.

DC: Oh OK, that's right.

AL: And at that time, it was, it was an old, Polish neighborhood-like. You know, everybody knew everybody. And I remember when I was a kid, they used to—the biggest thing, they'd have a empty field or something, they'd put a—build a house there, or would—moved homes into the area.

DC: Hmm.

AL: And now it's all burned out. The coloreds came in there, and it's kind of run down. The factory areas and stuff.

DC: That's around Lynch Road, you say?

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK. So tell me more about what it was like when you were, when you were growing up. You said it was mostly a Polish neighborhood?

AL: Uh huh. We had, we had by, hung around with guys, about, about fifteen of us. Used to hang around, run around, played ball, have a good time. And I know one—I'm still hanging after forty-some years—he's in Vegas with us.

DC: Oh really.

AL: Yeah. His family—well he's out there before us, and we still see him almost every day, and call him or something. So we're in touch pretty close, and I know, most of the guys, where they're still at, and everything. Some are in trouble, got in jail. But me and Dave were the only ones that kept our nose pretty well clean.

DC: Did your father continue to work at Midland Steel?

AL: No. Midland Steel, they went out of business, or it closed down, and he got laid off. And then he went to a couple of different factories—he worked at in Troy, Michigan. And I worked there too with him. I forget the name of the place. But then he went—he ended up before he died at Bud Wheel, working for Bud Wheel.

DC: Bud Wheel, OK. Do you know when he moved to that factory in Troy?

AL: Oh, it had to be when I came out of the service, in about ’61.

DC: OK. Hmm. And how about during the war years. You would have been just a baby.

AL: Yeah, he worked at Midland Steel, I understand.

DC: OK, that’s what he did.

AL: He worked at Midland steel up to, oh geez, had to be in the late ‘50s or something.

DC: Is that when they closed, the late ‘50s?

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK, yeah. And you said your mother was home. Did you have any siblings, any brothers or sisters?

AL: Yeah, I have one brother and two sisters.

DC: OK, and were you the oldest?

AL: No. No, the youngest son. I had a brother older than me, then two sisters.

DC: O,h OK. All right. Two sisters after you?

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK, so you had a houseful then.

AL: Yeah.

DC: A number of kids, yeah. Um, what about school. What was your school like?

AL: Well, we went to a Catholic school to start with, down at Six Mile and Van Dyke, Holy Name was the school—me and my brother and sisters. Then I went down through junior high in [Burls?] That was off of Van Dyke by Harper, around that area.

DC: That was called Burls?

AL: Burls Junior High [check?]. Then after that I went to Pershing High School for about a year. Then I quit and went in the service.

DC: Oh, OK. So let’s see, what year was that when you went in the service?

AL: Oh it had to be, [thinks a bit] about ’58.

DC: About ’58, OK. All right. We’ll sneak up on that. We’ve got to stay back in the past a little bit more. Um, what did your family do for fun when you were growing up? What kinds of things did you do?

AL: Mostly we just went [?]—Dad was mostly a worker and he did a lot of drinking and stuff. We went on, like, picnics and stuff.

DC: OK.

AL: And me and my brother weren’t—I tried to be close to him, but we never were close. And I was close to my sisters and stuff, but we just—as far as family, we didn’t do too much, just—I remember once we went to Cass Lake on a picnic, or every Sunday, we would go to my grandmother’s on the farm, every Sunday.

DC: Was that the farm in Plymouth?

AL: Yeah, off of Schoolcraft.

DC: All right.

AL: And, well, all my aunts from my mother’s side, every Sunday they got together and stuff—had, I don’t know, would get together and stuff, which was—the kids ran out in the woods, and the grownups were in the house.

DC: Yeah. Did you enjoy those times?

AL: Oh yeah. That was a good time. We used to play out in the woods and stuff. Where my grandmother lives—well they had about, uh, let’s see—each one of her girls got forty acres, so they had a hundred and twenty acres of land. And my Aunt Margie lived out there, my Uncle Harvey lived out there, right next to each other, and my grandmother’s was on the hill. So all this—well her farm, we called it a farm, but it was just like chickens and stuff. It wasn’t no cows, though, like that.

DC: Did you ever go out there to help out with chores or anything?

AL: No. Me and my wife went out there later in time, because we—after we got married we needed money, so I went and painted my grandmother’s house. She paid us for that. But the biggest thing is, grandfather used to grow tomatoes and melons and stuff, and you had a fruit stand out on the road. And we used to help carry the fruit down to the road. He said, “Anytime you break a melon, you gotta eat it.” And we broke a few melons! [laughs]

DC: Maybe on purpose?

AL: Yeah.

DC: [laughs] So was that when you were younger?

AL: Yeah, when we were little guys, and yeah. In our—before we even hit teens. We had a good time out there.

DC: Yeah. But it sounds like the picnics and family visits were the center of your social life. What about church? Was that a part of your life?

AL: Well yeah [not enthused]. Holy Name, that's a Catholic Church, and I had to go to—before you went to school, you had to go down to church every morning. So I don't go no more, because I did all my time already [laughs]. And my mother, my mother was real religious and stuff. My Dad wasn't. He never stopped or nothing, but she was. And when we had any, like, any kind of drives for the schools, or church—we raised at church, selling candy and making money. I remember one time we were building a new church. It was a dollar a brick. I remember that. So we—she would [?] to that a little bit. [he might be saying that his Dad got a bit involved in this]

DC: Yeah, yeah. But you said your Dad wasn't so involved in the . . .

AL: No, my Dad, he went to like christenings, weddings and stuff, but never went on Sunday.

DC: You said he liked to drink. Would he, like, go out with the guys, or would he stay at home?

AL: No, stay at home and drink, beer and stuff. And eventually it got to him, you know, drinking too much. He got his liver and stuff, but he never ran—well, I can't say he never ran around, but he never—when we were older, he never—he stayed at home drinking.

DC: Yeah. What was his job at Midland Steel back then?

AL: He started out—I know he was a foreman in the shop, and then he got cut back, and then he was like a job setter, or controlling stuff like that.

DC: Would that have been going back to a production job, as opposed to management?

AL: Yeah, yeah.

DC: OK, yeah.

AL: Well he never told us the whole story and stuff like that, but I know he was a supervisor at one time, and then he got, then he was just like a laborer, working machinery and stuff 'til he went—like job setter didn't—they just kept cutting back and stuff. And then he

was working machine, I remember, because I—well there was another little shop he worked at he took me to. And they were showing me how to take this machine, you weld two parts together, and you don't do it right, it doesn't hold. That's before my time.

DC: Yeah, well, you say he would tell you about that or show you about that—did you ever go to work with him? Did you ever see where he worked?

AL: One time. When I came out of the service—he worked in a small shop. I'm—it wasn't—he was bouncing around at that time, trying to get a job.

DC: Yeah, that was when they wasn't Midland Steel anymore.

AL: Yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK.

AL: And—only thing at Midland Steel I remember is the union meetings. At Christmastime, he had the Christmas parties and stuff, and we used to go there—which they had Santa Claus and all, all the things that—kids get all presents. But that's—I remember the factory was a long—it was over a couple blocks long. And the doors—people would open their door, and he showed, pointed out where his area of working was. That's about it. I think the Union and the company really messed over all their workers there.

DC: How so?

AL: Uh, they cut them back, you know. They kept on losing jobs, losing, uh, benefits and stuff, it seems like. And they eventually closed, well they closed down, and they took the Union Hall and everything—you know, because it was in their name—so they took it. So the Union lost out on that one. But then they got smarter—because that's at the beginning, must have been back in the '50s, or so.

DC: So your mother was raising the kids then, throughout this period, it sounds like.

AL: Uh huh. Yeah.

DC: Did she have any other outside activities that you can remember?

AL: Not really. Just taking care of the house, and taking care of us kids.

DC: Big cleanings on Fridays.

AL: Yeah, every Friday. Can come home from school, and you can smell the bleaches and everything else in the house.

DC: Did you have any cleaning responsibilities?

AL: No.

DC: No.

AL: They never really—there wasn't none of that, you know, it's your job to cut the grass, or take out the garbage. We just, we were always free to do what we wanted almost, and stuff.

DC: So you didn't have any chores around the house.

AL: Uh uh.

DC: OK.

AL: I helped, you know, once in awhile, if I got time, I'd go cut the grass or—but it wasn't an every weekly thing.

DC: Did you have any jobs as a kid?

AL: Oh yeah.

DC: Once you got a little older?

AL: I was about, I think about eleven, twelve when I started peddling papers for Detroit News.

DC: OK. Did you have a regular route?

AL: Yeah. In fact, it was a good route, because right at, it was on my street that we lived on.

DC: Oh that's good, yeah, yeah. What did you do with the money?

AL: Well I only made about five dollars a week. We had to buy our own stuff. We just use our money for things we wanted, like to help out with our shoes, or whatever and stuff. Nothing, blow it on too much junk stuff.

DC: Yeah, so you had to make sure that you bought some necessities, it sounds like.

AL: Yeah.

DC: What about any other jobs you might have had?

AL: Well, I went from there to working at a grocery stores—a packer, and carry out the groceries and stuff. And I worked myself up to working in the beer coolers.

DC: OK.

AL: When the trucks would come up—that was when the trucks came in, I'd count the cases of beer came in, empties going out, and same thing with the pop companies when they brought stuff in.

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

AL: I would say about fourteen or fifteen. So I worked a couple years there. It was a neighborhood store, and everybody in the neighborhood worked for Tony's.

DC: OK, yeah.

AL: So [?], he took care of all the kids in the neighborhood that way. It was a small, family—well it was a big store, because it was his—Tony's sister's husband owned another store about a half mile down the road. So, it was all family stuff, and he had the kids working all the time.

DC: OK, so all the neighborhood kids would get their start there, at Tony's, OK. Hmm. You mentioned this one friend that you still get in touch with, almost daily, out in Vegas . . .

AL: Oh yeah, Dave. Dave [Rory?].

DC: Are there any people you remember from—kids you hung out with?

AL: There was Tom Fanzoni. We hung out with him. He was on the next street. Like Ryman, Ron Ryman—I don't see him no more. He—his parents were more like upper class and stuff. They acted upper class and stuff, but us kids got along with them. But that's—Dave's the only one I really see now. Bob comes out once in awhile to Vegas, and you know, sees us. But that's about it.

DC: Did you all get involved in things like Scouts or sports, or anything like that?

AL: Um, we got in sports. We played ball and stuff. But we just ran the streets.

DC: OK.

AL: We always stuck together. No gang or—well they called it gang, but at that time it wasn't like the gangs nowadays. We're just a bunch of guys just hanging around and having a good time. We never—that's one thing we always said, we never caused nobody else trouble. Like we used to hang around in the cemetery. We never destroyed nothing. But we just hung around there. And played handball at the school. The school used to get made, because at that time there'd be having classes and we'd be playing handball, hitting the ball against the wall. And the principal had to come out and chase us away—it was bothering the classes.

DC: Were you supposed to be in school?

AL: I think we were out in the summertime or something.

DC: Oh, OK.

AL: But I went to school once in awhile [twinkle in his eyes].

DC: [laughs]

AL: I never went—we skipped a lot back then and stuff. And we got away with it until we got caught by our parents and stuff.

DC: OK, yeah. Was it different skipping school, say, at the Catholic school as opposed to when you got in the public schools?

AL: Yeah. When I was in Catholic school, you couldn't skip school.

DC: OK.

AL: I was just—you know, I wasn't hanging around with the guys; I was so little then. But when I went down to junior high at Burls, that's when I started meeting all them guys in the neighborhood and stuff.

DC: Yeah. So what would you do when you skipped?

AL: Oh, we used to go out to the railroad tracks, and all kinds of things.

DC: Yeah.

AL: Used to have car lots. We used to get—go in there, and we knew where they hid the keys, and we used to drive the cars around the, in the lots, brand new cars and stuff. All—we never damaged them. We just drove around until they chased us out. That's all.

DC: What did your parents have to say when they found out you were skipping school?

AL: Oh, they were mad, and so what. Got punished, you know, a day or something, and made us go back to school. They brought us up right, but they didn't bring us up, you know, beating us or nothing like that. I remember one time, only one time my Dad ever tried to chase me, tried to get me. And that's when I talked back to my mother one time. That was the only time that he ever tried to, you know, hit me, or did anything to punish us. We were pretty good kids back then.

DC: How old do you think you were when you talked back to your Mom.

AL: Oh, I was ten, eleven, something. Yeah, really young. Back then you respect your parents. You're brought up that way and stuff. That's the way I brought my daughter up,

Kim, so, and we did a good job. Because I see some of these kids nowadays—oh, they're terrible. They don't listen, they run around, drugs. And that's one thing I never did, try any drugs. Never took drugs. I did enough drinking, I said, so I didn't have to worry about that.

DC: Were you guys drinking back in high school.

AL: Ooh, yeah.

DC: OK, yeah.

AL: We did a lot of—we partied down a lot. Because I don't think I was about, oh, I was fourteen and I was buying stuff on [Change?] street, going to eh liquor store. Phony proof and stuff.

DC: So you had to have your fake ID, or whatever?

AL: Uh huh. Yeah

DC: Yeah. OK. But everyone would have known who you were, right?

AL: Yeah, well, that was a different area for me. I used to hang over—because it's—I used to hang around our area and then I got with a group down by—Ken Rizinski [sp?] was my best buddy. In fact the first time we met, he beat me up and everything. That was in junior high. And after that we got real close, and for some reason we just started to hang around Change Street and stuff. We had some girls out there and stuff like that. But—me and Ken went in the Army together. Had the buddy plan at that time. But we all had parties and stuff. Like I said, Tom Franzoni's mother, she was, she was an angel. And when we got too drunk, she made us stay at her house, and the mother—all the mothers took care of us that way. And wouldn't—she'd rather have us at the houses than running in the streets, and took care of us that way. But they never bought us nothing. They just—we had our own ways to get stuff.

DC: Um, I'm trying to get you to think back to when you were a teenager, before you went in the Army—uh, you know, your Dad was kind of in the final stages of Midland Steel, it sounds like, before they went out—uh, do you have any sense about how your family was doing economically at that time?

AL: Well, when he was working at Midland Steel, he had money. He was pulling in, you know, good wages and stuff.

DC: Even after he went down from being a supervisor to the job setting . . .

AL: *Yeah*, but he was tight-fisted with his money. When my Mom—you know, wouldn't give my Mom, just enough money for us to get to school and stuff. He took, you know, he controlled the money at that time. He controlled the family. And well—I lost my . . .

DC: Uh, something about how comfortably you were living economically . . .

AL: Yeah but, you know, he wouldn't give us any extra to run around, buy candy and stuff, but then he took care of it. My Mom would be asking for money, and he wouldn't give her for stuff, you know, stuff she needed for the house, he said, "Aw, you don't need it." And stuff like that.

DC: So she'd have to ask him for everything.

AL: Yeah, oh yeah. It was the type of family where he made the money, he controlled it, paid the bills and everything. Even up until he died, he took care of everything, because—eventually my mother became—you know, she started drinking and stuff. But she had MS. And she was bedridden and everything.

DC: Was she drinking before then?

AL: I think about the same time she found out she had MS, she started drinking. There was a lot of drinking in my family. That's why I quit and all. I learned my lesson. My brother, he was an alcoholic. He used to make some good money, my brother. Well that's farther out, this is life and stuff.

DC: Sure.

AL: But he was a draftsman. He was a leader in drafting. And I remember he used to bring work home on the weekend—there was this one diagram and stuff, got paid a thousand dollars a diagram. He was making good money. But he would never—he was one day—him and his wife didn't know how to control their money. He blew everything. So he could have had a better life than he did.

DC: He's younger than you, right?

AL: No, he was older.

DC: Oh wait a minute, OK, I got it mixed up. I'm sorry. I've got to go back to my notes here.

AL: Yeah, he was older than I was.

DC: About a year or two, or what?

AL: Uh, about two years.

DC: Two years older, yeah.

AL: He never, he never learned to control spending. Him and his wife were—about bills and stuff. He just didn't have, I don't' know, couldn't take care of himself. They had, like,

have a dollar in their pocket, they'd go and spend it—on some—party down or something, which I learned, when I was in the Army—I learned a lot—my best thing I ever did was going in the Army, and stuff.

DC: Well let's talk about that. You said you dropped out of high school and went into the Army.

AL: Yeah.

DC: What made you decide to do that?

AL: Was—had a car, and didn't have a job no more. I quit that store. Just running around. And me and Kenny got together, said we're going to go in the Army. And we went down to the recruiter, and the recruiter tried to talk to my parents—you know, they had to sign for me. And they didn't want to sign. And the recruiter said I'm kind of young to go in, because I wasn't even seventeen yet. I was just, I think it was just going seventeen or something—anyways, they had to sign for me. And—but eventually, they said OK. They signed the papers, and we were off.

DC: Did you talk with your parents about it?

AL: No. It was—we just decided to go in the Army.

DC: OK, but they had to eventually sign the papers. Did you talk to them about that part of it?

AL: Yeah. They came down—the recruiter had to come down to the house to try to get the papers signed.

DC: What did your parents say?

AL: Well they said I was too young and stuff. But I told them, I says, "This is what I want to do." And he said, "OK." You know, they weren't happy, but they let me do it. And I think that was the best thing that ever happened to me, when I went in the service. Made me grow up a lot. Wasn't, you know, running the streets. I know eventually I would have, I would have been caught and thrown in jail or something, doing some dumb things, or drinking, or got killed. Who knows?

DC: So where did you go after you joined the Army?

AL: Went down to Fort Knox, Kentucky for six months, and then I went over to Germany for two and a half years—same place. Fort Knox for basic training, and the AIT training for tanks, and then I went down to [?], right by Nuremburg, Germany, for two and a half years.

DC: Well tell me about your basic training. What was that like?

AL: Oh, it was, it was, it as a little rough, but I enjoyed it. You know, like they said, I had SOS stuff for breakfast and stuff. I enjoyed eating that stuff. And a couple things, you know, the hardest thing for me was learning the chain of command. I couldn't learn the chain of command to save my soul. It got me more trouble for extra duty because I couldn't learn the chain of command, from, you know, from your first, your sergeants all the way up to commander-in-chief.

DC: So were you just behaving inappropriately in front of the wrong people or something?

AL: No. I just, just, couldn't get it in my head who was next in command, like your battalion commander, your company commander, and stuff like that.

DC: When you said you got in trouble for it, how would you get in trouble for that?

AL: Not knowing it, they'd make you have extra duty.

DC: Oh, OK.

AL: Like raking leaves, and stuff like that.

DC: Oh OK. Would they just quiz you?

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK. All right. What about the discipline and all that of training?

AL: Well that's what made me become a man.

DC: Yeah.

AL: Because, hey, you know, used to running the streets and everything, and then all of a sudden you got somebody over you, and he's telling you to do something, you better go and do it.

DC: Did you ever resist?

AL: Oh no. I had—in my head, I asked for it. A lot of guys that are like U.S.—they're drafted and stuff—and they said we never asked for this, why should we do it, and stuff. They're all kids, about twenty—those, those guys were about twenty, twenty-one years old. And I said, I asked for it. I made up my mind to do this, so why fight it?

DC: Sure, yeah. What was it like being so young at training?

AL: Well, made me straighten up and do the right thing and everything, I figure. And I saw stuff I'd never see if I was, you know, not in the service—like going overseas and being in a foreign country, and meeting—I know I did wrong things. Like in Germany, you'd

go out and drink. You could be twelve years old and drink legal out there. And I worked my way up and became a sergeant out in the service. So that's, you know . . .

DC: Did Kenny go with you to Fort Knox?

AL: Yeah—well he went—yeah, we went to Fort Knox, we were in the same group. We were on the buddy plan, and we were doing, you know, we went overseas. I went to B Company, and he went to Headquarters Company, which was just a couple buildings apart, and we—that's where we started splitting up. Because I had guys—I was in my platoon, we used to hang around together. And he was with Headquarter Company, so we started splitting up. After that, I hardly ever seen him.

DC: OK. So you said you were at Fort Knox for what, six months?

AL: Yeah, basic training and AIT.

DC: OK, what was the AIT?

AL: That's like the training that's for, you know, tanks.

DC: Is that something you chose, or did you get slotted that way?

AL: No, no, they give you a test and everything else, see where your, where you fit in—infantry, tanks, whatever.

DC: What were they planning on having you do with tanks?

AL: Well I started out with a—there's a—you got a crew of four people. You started out, the lowest one is a—which is the loader, then you went to the driver, then the gunner, and eventually, you know, if you had the rank, you could be the sergeant of the—control the whole thing. But I was, I was always on the lieutenant's tank, so I couldn't get that last step. I went from loader to driver and gunner. [?] We had Lieutenant Bird, we had a night shooting test, and our tank was the only one that passed, and we had a big write-up—well not a big, a write-up in the Detroit area, that our tank was the only one that passed out of the whole company, and stuff like that.

DC: Wow. So that sounds pretty good.

AL: Ah yeah.

DC: That was during training, you know, you were saying.

AL: When I was overseas.

DC: That was overseas.

AL: Overseas, yeah.

DC: I lost track of the timing there. Uh, so, um, how much, let's see—how many of those different positions did you learn in your AIT at Fort Knox?

AL: Mostly you just learned about tanks and the different shells that you use. You just—basically what you learn is about the tank. You know, the engines. They had, you know packs, diesel pack, or gas-pack engines back then in those tanks. And you learn the different, you know, commands, and all kinds of stuff like that.

DC: Did you ever see your family during those six months?

AL: Yeah, one time, me and Kenny, we was—went AWOL, came back home.

DC: Oh you did.

AL: Yeah, it was on a holiday, so we hitchhiked all the way back home, got home, and turned around, had to go right back. We got money from our parents to get on a bus and go back, because we didn't want to be Absent Without Leave.

DC: So did they catch you?

AL: No, no. They never did catch us. So we were lucky.

DC: So you just basically said hello, then hightailed it right back, huh?

AL: Yeah. That's about it, because it took us a couple days to hitchhike. We were on—we took a truck route, and truckers wouldn't pick us up and stuff. But finally we had cars and stuff that got us. So it took us quite a while to get back home. And he shipped us back, you know, we went back on a Greyhound Bus.

DC: Huh. So when did you find out you were going to go to Germany?

AL: Right after basic, uh, AIT training. You know, there were—got that through then that you could be sent to infantry, usually. My classification wasn't 131.1, which is a tank. So they found out we were going over to Germany. [this is confusing] So the next thing we know—we didn't come home for leave or nothing—got on the boats. Or they shipped us to—how we got to New York? Was it train, or somehow, got on a boat—we called them cattle boats, because man, he had a bunch of us on there. And we went across the ocean.

DC: So when was this? 1958. '59, somewhere in there?

AL: Had to be right about fifty, about '58.

DC: OK. Is that around the time that your Dad was losing his job at Midland Steel?

AL: Oh, he was out of there already.

DC: He was out already at that point.

AL: Yeah, he was out already. He was different, other shops and stuff like that.

DC: OK, all right. Was that part of your consideration, that it was good to be in the Army, because things were a little unstable back at home?

AL: No. Oh, it was a little unstable, but main thing was, I didn't want to get in, you know, any serious trouble.

DC: OK, yeah.

AL: You know, running the streets and stuff like that.

DC: Did you know other people in your neighborhood who had gone into the service?

AL: Let's see, at that time, no, I think me and Kenny were the first ones that left. But after I left, Dave went in the Navy, and Wayne went to the Marines. I think, we were the only ones that were in the service, of the group, that I know of.

DC: Had your Dad been in the service?

AL: No. See my Dad—like, I used to like, not to fish too much. I liked to hunt and stuff. My Dad never, well he would—I guess when they were kids, they were saying that he went pheasant hunting and stuff, but he never showed us stuff about hunting, or—I used to, when I came out I used to go up—I was the hunter in the family, and I used to go out hunting all the time.

DC: But that was only after you were in the service?

AL: Uh huh. Uh huh.

DC: OK. Did you ever hunt when you were a teenager?

AL: No. Oh? No. We went out time, it was a group of guys, we had a rifle and stuff, and went out in the woods—I guess we were—we didn't know what we were doing. We had a rifle, and tried to go bird hunting and stuff. We didn't know beans. But, no, nobody ever trained me about fishing or hunting and stuff. My Dad wasn't—he wasn't a sportsman. He watched, you know, like a baseball game on television, stuff like that. But he never would—he was just work and staying at home.

DC: Did you ever go to a baseball game, like Tiger Stadium or something?

AL: Once or twice, not very often. I mean, one time we went to a football game, my Dad took us. I remember, because it was cold. And we had hot chocolate. That's all I remember about going to a football game and having a hot chocolate. And it was cold. I remember one time we went down by Hamtramck—oh, I was real little—and he had fireworks. There must have been a fireworks display, and it kind of scared me and everything. It was right after the war, because I was—said it was the Japs coming. I remember that, but that was all I remember.

DC: Yeah. Well anyways, what was Germany like?

AL: I enjoyed it. I mean, it was—the language barrier was hard. You had to learn some, you know, some of their language, there at [name of base?]. Germany, the people, you couldn't, you know, they were the nicest people you could find. And a lot of times, the GIs would screw over them. That's—I couldn't see that.

DC: How so? What would they do?

AL: They would take monopoly money to these small villages and try to pass it off as American money and stuff. It was people that would do anything for you. I mean, even in the big cities and stuff, they were, they were pretty nice. At that time, that was back in 1959, 1960, and at that time, there was no dope in the service or nothing. They had none of that stuff going around. And GIs, you know, they took advantage of the German people, but the German people took advantage of the United States.

DC: How did they do that?

AL: Well if we knocked down—we're tank drivers and stuff—we knock down a fence, kill a chicken or hit a tree, the government had to pay for it and stuff. So, I mean, you had to pay for it when the chicken was—how many eggs it would have laid, and how many chickens would have came out, and oh, all kinds of stuff.

DC: Had to calculate all that out, huh?

AL: Yeah.

DC: So where were you based?

AL: Uh . . .

DC: Nuremburg, you said? Right around Nuremberg?

AL: Nuremberg was the big city, and [Firthal?] was like the suburbs of it. And we were at Monteague[sp?] Barracks. It was an old Air Force base for the Germans during the war. It was just a small, little unit and stuff, but it wasn't bad. I think it was—we had A, B, C Company, D Company—D Company was heavy tanks. And I was in light tanks, [middle?] tanks.

DC: OK. How many Americans were based there?

AL: Oh, under a thousand, I think, because we had artillery with us. And, see—[thinking out loud] there was four, five, twenty, twenty guys to a company, four companies. There were platoons, so twenty, about eighty to a hundred guys to a company. That's one, two, about four hundred, well maybe two thousand, because there's about a thousand in tankers, and the rest was artillery. That was probably another thousand artillery out there.

DC: Yeah. Did they ever tell you what your mission was?

AL: Yeah.

DC: How did you perceive your mission?

AL: We're—our mission was, if the war break out, we were supposed to stop them. But then it was—we were to survive. They came out and told you: we were paid killers. They came out and told us: "You're a bunch of paid killers." And you're just to be a action to stop whoever's coming over for a short time until we get the units from the states over there. Because at that time, they didn't have no jets or nothing flying over there. It was all props, boats. That didn't make us feel too happy! Every time we were out on maneuvers—[??] two, I know that for sure, two—every time we got by the border and stuff we had to turn the tubes the opposite way and they were real strict about that.

DC: Which border was that?

AL: Probably the Russian border, around that area.

DC: OK, all right. Hmm. So you said that you were able to go into town a little bit and practice your German and stuff. How much time did you have off while you were in . . .

AL: Oh, we had, we had—after duties at night, we can go to town, get a pass, go to town—and weekends. They were pretty lenient on that. In fact when I got over there, was on a holiday—don't ask me what holiday—probably the Fourth of July—and I couldn't leave barracks for the first two weeks. It was like orientation or something. And company commander got hold of a couple guys in my platoons, asked if they could take me to town with them, and I wanted to go, because—keep an eye on me, for—I learned the rules and so. So I got to go to town right off the bat and stuff. And I used to love their food. German food, and a beer of course.

DC: Yeah, sure. Did they make any effort to teach you German?

AL: No. No. You learned on your own from the guest house and stuff. The German people in there—you just pick up a few words here and there. I had a buddy over there—he was around from Florida or down South someplace—he learned German fluent. He got a hold of a German girl that couldn't hardly speak English, and he married her and stuff.

And he learned German fluently an everything from her. So we used to pick up words from him—mostly counting and how to order beer and stuff like that.

DC: Were the American soldiers from all over the country?

AL: Oh yeah.

DC: Yeah.

AL: I had guys—oh, our—some guys—one guy was from New York in our company, or our platoon. He was a [mentions another person]—he was from down in Florida. We were all over the place. Diffferent, all over. We had—at the very end, I think, we finally had a colored guy in our company came. We were all white at one time.

DC: When you first got there it . . .

AL: Uh huh. Our platoon was all-white.

DC: And what about other people at the same base? Were there other . . .

AL: Oh they were mixed and everything. We were just—we had [?], that's all.

DC: OK. Were blacks generally not involved in tank units then?

AL: Uh, not really. They were involved in them, but . . .

DC: Just not in yours?

AL: . . . not our platoon. We had them in the company and everything. We had, like Headquarters Company, First Platoon, Second Platoon, and Third Platoon, and they had, you know, one or two guys—not a whole lot.

DC: Uh huh. Uh huh. Did you know, when you got to Germany, how long you'd stay there?

AL: Yeah, only twenty-two years. [really?] So I was supposed to come back for my last six months in the States. But it didn't happen. The Berlin Wall went up, and I missed my rotation date by—the age a certain date you can come back, I missed it by, like two weeks. So I had to stay another six months over there.

DC: So what was it like when the Berlin Wall went up?

AL: Actually, we knew it was going up and everything, but we didn't' know the whole—what was actually going on. They didn't tell us that the wall, and all the trouble they're having over there in Berlin. All I knew was I had to stay there another six months. That's all I cared about.

DC: OK, yeah.

AL: I was planning on coming back home, and buying a car, and serving my last six months here.

DC: Yeah, well did your activity change at all when the Berlin Wall went up? Did you, you know, maneuver more?

AL: No, about the same. We were just on alert more.

DC: What would it mean to be on alert?

AL: Means—our tanks were already armed, ready to go out at all times. But when we went out on, like alerts and stuff, we got live ammo for our side arms and everything. Other times, the only time we get live ammo for your side arms is during guard duty.

DC: OK.

AL: And this—and May 1st, every May 1st you had alert—May Day. You know, so we were—we had to go out there in our tanks at night and sit there all night waiting for the order to move out or stay there.

DC: So what, the fear was that if there was an attack, it would happen on May Day or [??]?

AL: It just—they always thought if there was going to be an attack, it was going to be on May Day, for some reason. But a lot of times, the Germans knew we were going to have an alert before we did. Because they had to get the government—our government had to get permission from their government to start moving out at night and stuff. So they had to get all kinds of written permissions, so the Germans would be in town, they was telling you, "Better go hide, or take off," because if you're in town, if you know there's an alert, we never went back to base. So the girls used to tell us: "You have an alert tonight."

DC: So not a lot of secrecy there?

AL: No.

DC: [laughs] So did the girls in Germany, then, welcome the soldiers?

AL: Oh yes. All the people did. I mean, the only ones that really didn't is the younger men, because we were taking their, dating their women, and drinking their beer and stuff like that. But—[hiccups] excuse me—we never had a whole lot of trouble, nothing like that. Everybody was just like a big party.

DC: Oh, OK. Did you come across any Germans who had served in the war?

AL: Not that I know of, no. I seen a lot of villages and—in fact I got pictures at home of buildings that got machine-gunned, and, you know, bullet holes. Big [??], because a lot of our maneuvers were in those areas and stuff. It was like part of our American—the United States owned that—didn't own it, but rented it, whatever, and they never did fix up the buildings. They just left it. But you see scars of war at that time through Europe all over the place and stuff, where they were fixing it up. I mean it wasn't all bombed out or nothing, but it was pretty well fixed up, but you just see buildings that had bullet holes and stuff.

DC: Yeah. Did you communicate with your parents much during those years?

AL: Not much. In fact, they—my parents got hold of a Red Cross, the Red Cross got hold of my company, the company commander got hold of me, started telling me, "Start writing home more often." [laughs]

DC: They wanted to hear from you.

AL: Yeah. Well, you know, I was on duty and running around, and I was about, what, seventeen, eighteen years old, having a good time over there.

DC: Weren't about to sit down and write, huh?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Um, did you miss anything about home during those years?

AL: No. I came home, well, I came home one time on Christmas—I was going to surprise my parents—and I got the surprise, because they were all drunk.

DC: Oh, OK. So you came back from Germany for Christmas? You didn't tell them you were coming?

AL: No. I saved up my money, and got an airline ticket, and got my pass, you know, for a thirty-day leave. Come back here, and I didn't enjoy it, because even all the guys I used to hang around with, they all had their own lives going. Everything was different.

DC: They had moved on, huh?

AL: Yeah, everything moved on—so I went back overseas and I moved on.

DC: did you stay the whole thirgy days?

AL: Oh yeah.

DC: So what did you—when you opened the door, or knocked on the door, whatever, what did you find?

AL: Well, they were, they were all drunked up, my parents were, and stuff.

DC: Was it Christmas, or . . .

AL: Right before Christmas. It was—I got home late. And so, I was kind of disappointed.

DC: Were they happy to see you at all?

AL: Yeah, they were, you know, I was their son, no matter what. They were, you know, that was life in our family and all. But you know, I used to drink a lot. At that time—well before I went to the service I drank a lot—and when I was in the service I drank. Not on duty or nothing. And when I came back, I drank a lot after I got out. Then I got married, and I drank a little bit. And then my wife got me to stop altogether. So I quit drinking, smoking, and running around. I never ran around on her, but used to go out, you know, drink at home before I went to work and stuff like that. Then I got to the point where I was going to work with hangovers, and I kept on saying I had a headache. I says that ain't no headache, that's a hangover, so I just quit. I said my job was too important and everything else.

DC: When was that? When did you quit?

AL: It had to be over twenty-some years ago.

DC: OK.

AL: It was a long time.

DC: You said that you had to spend your last six months in Germany instead of coming back, so what was it like when you finally came back?

AL: Well, I came back and met a couple of the guys. . . .

DC: From here?

AL: Yeah, I used to hang around with—because that's how I met my wife. And me Dave and Tom, we were triple-dating, and Tom was running around with this girl, Kathy [sp?] was in our neighborhood. And my wife and one of her friends—my wife lived down by Van Dyke and Harper, on Hanover[?]—Gratiot, down in that area. And her friend lived across Van Dyke from us. We went—and Dave was a big guy. You know he was heavy-set. Tom had Kathy, and I told Dave, you're going to get the fat girl. I ain't going to get her. I met my wife that way. But when I came home, it wasn't a big group of guys no more. They were getting married, dating, going their way. So we still partied down a little bit.

DC: Were you living at your parents' house at that point?

AL: Yeah, came back home.

DC: Yeah. What was it like being back home after being away for so long?

AL: Well, I had to go look for a job and settle down. I mean the Army settled me down where I'd go get a job and stuff. I remember when I was in the Army, I bought a watch. And I had payments on it. And well, in the Army you're always broke at the end of the month anyways, because you don't get that much, and you had a bar bill to take care of. And I said, "This is dumb paying every month for this watch." So I paid it all off. Said, "I ain't"—didn't want no more bills like that. And every month, you had to take your—you had your pay at the beginning of each month, you had to go to the guest house [pub] to pay your bill, and you were broke again. So you kept on charging your bills. I said, "This isn't working out." I'm always broke. So one month I just sat in the barracks, didn't do nothing, paid off my bills, and I had money.

DC: Wow, that's interesting. OK, yeah . . .

AL: I learned how to control money that way.

DC: Cold turkey on spending, huh?

AL: That beat being broke all the time.

DC: Yeah, yeah, sure. So anyways, how long did it take you to get a job once you got back to, to this area?

AL: Well, it was hard. Even when I came off, got off the ship and everything else—like I was in New York, and I went and got a shave and all this stuff, you know, and the barber said, "Best to stay in the service. Time's are hard out here."

DC: Yeah, what year was this now?

AL: Had to be '61.

DC: '61, OK.

AL: '61. And I said, "No." I was all done with the service. And I came back, got back home, and my buddy Dave's brother—actually, I was looking for work for quite awhile. You couldn't find nothing. He got me a job as a painter, which I never painted in my life. He had a cousin—Dave's brother knew a guy that did it for a business.

DC: What kind of painting?

AL: House painting. Interior and exterior decorating. So I worked with him for a couple years, met my wife, and . . .

DC: Did you ever consider staying in the service at any point?

AL: Off and on. [??]—like I said, if I would have met my wife—my main thing was, if I had a wife, I would have stayed. I had the rank, and I had—everything was going good for me. But I wasn't married, and I was just, well, about twenty-one, and so I just . . .

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

AL: . . . about our girls, and stuff like that. It wasn't [??] living with girls.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

AL: But otherwise, I would have stayed, stayed in, because after I got out I was on active—inactive duty for so many times. I got called in a couple times.

DC: Oh really. What would happen when you got called in?

AL: Just, I was on alert, that I could be called back to active duty, and stuff like that.

DC: OK.

AL: But I never did.

DC: So you'd be at home, but just be alerted that you could be called back?

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AL: Because they had me for another three years.

DC: OK, inactive duty, OK, yeah, wow. All right. So anyways, you did house painting. Tell me what that was like.

AL: Well, that was pretty good. I mean, I wasn't, you know I was single and everything at the time, and he had the—I was, you know, working all kinds of hours, making good money. But he would pay me when he wanted to pay me.

DC: OK.

AL: It wasn't every—you got your check every Friday and stuff. And he had the attitude: "Well, you're single. You don't need the money right away. I can pay you later," and

stuff. Which he was a good guy. He taught me a lot and I learned. And after I started dating my wife, she says, "Now that ain't going to work"—gonna get your paycheck every week."

DC: Yeah, yeah. So maybe he was paying you when he got paid for jobs? Is that what was happening?

AL: Yeah, yeah. He was always behind on his bills and stuff too. He had a crew of about four or five of us and stuff. He was, he was painting—like at that time it was Fox Hill, over here on Woodward. It was expensive homes and stuff. Big, big homes.

DC: How did you like that work?

AL: I enjoyed it. It was something different. I never did it before. I hate painting now, though. I painted so much. But it was something to learn.

DC: Did you get pretty good at it?

AL: Yeah, we got pretty good.

DC: How long did it take to learn how to paint well?

AL: Well, he told us, you know, the first time I was on a house doing a window, took me about an hour. He says, "A window's supposed to take you five minutes," and stuff like that. He's—so you know, he pushed me along, and he got me to learn the trade and stuff, which wasn't bad.

DC: So the owner of the company was the one teaching you how to do things?

AL: Yeah. Well, tell you, "Do it a little faster," little tricks about taping off and stuff like that.

DC: Yeah. Did you guys always work as a crew?

AL: Uh huh.

DC: The four or five of you?

AL: Yeah. Uh huh. He was just a small little company and stuff. In fact, he wanted to get out of the business, wanted to sell it to me. I says, "No." Because it just wasn't going to pay.

DC: Did he work with you . . .

AL: Yeah.

DC: . . . or did he just over see you? OK.

AL: Yeah.

DC: All right, so you all would move in and take care of a job.

AL: Yeah, he would get the jobs and stuff like that, and take us out—and we'd go be at his house in the morning, and he'd drive us to the jobs.

DC: Yeah, OK.

AL: He was there all the time unless he, you know, when he left to get more paint or something, but he was on the job all the time.

DC: Yeah, OK. And you did that for two years?

AL: Yeah, a couple years.

DC: And so was it steady work?

AL: Well, we had pretty steady work. It was very seldom that we didn't work. We always had a job doing something. He would try anything. I mean he would—we had this job by, on Woodward someplace, near downtown, that he was going to make a—I think a building he was going to make a restaurant out of it for these people. And he had to knock out windows, and I mean, knock out, take out the windows and brick them up and everything. Another one of the jobs I went on, one of the real fancy houses, they had silk wallpaper on the walls. And we had—they just wanted to change it. He told us, "Take it off very carefully," because he's going to keep it, and stuff. [laughs] But it was a good experience. It was another step forward. That's all.

DC: Yeah, yeah. So did you meet your wife during that time?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Because you said that she wanted you to get your paychecks regularly.

AL: Yeah.

DC: And tell me again how you met her.

AL: Well me, Dave, and Tom Franzoni were triple-dating.

DC: Yeah, that's right.

AL: And they were walking down the street—and Kathy was Tom's girl at the time—my wife—I didn't know, and I didn't know, Lepler, was the other girl's name. And after I seen him, I told Dave, I says, "You're gonna get the fat ones, because I'm getting the

skinny one." And that's how we dated. We just ran around that night, and I chased after her ever since. And she had a couple of other boyfriends and stuff, but I ended up with her.

DC: OK, so did you start dating pretty quickly then?

AL: Pretty quick—yeah—not real steady, but I kept pushing it, calling her up and stuff like that. Because she had another boyfriend and stuff. So I kind of—she knew me in high school. I didn't know her. She knew me in high school, and she hated me, she just said.

DC: Oh really.

AL: Yeah, well I was a black leather jacket and stuff, one of those guys used to always run around like that.

DC: So she thought you were with the wrong crowd?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Ah, OK.

AL: Because I paid back. I paid her back. I married her.

DC: So she recognized you from high school?

AL: Yeah.

DC: All right, yeah. So anyways, um, you were still living at home, then, for those two years?

AL: Yeah, uh huh. I lived at home after that 'til we got married. We got—after we got—we started dating and about six months later we went and got married.

DC: Oh really, OK.

AL: We got married right away.

DC: So, so you got married in what, sixty . . .

AL: About sixty, '64.

DC: '64, OK. All right.

AL: Around that time.

DC: So you must have . . .

AL: Now Kim was ’64—’63, someplace around there. Don’t let her know I didn’t know the date!

DC: Oh no, all right. We’ll, we’ll “X” that out [laughs]. But you were still painting houses. You said you did that . . .

AL: Painting houses. Yeah, then I quit that right about the time I met her, and then—because I was painting houses up there and one time we had a bad storm. I was working that night, and I drove over to her parents’ house, because I was worried, because it was a blackout and everything else. So I was painting at that time. And then I quit painting and I went—my Dad was working down in Troy, Michigan, at a small factory there, where we were making missile carriers. And he got me in there as a grinder and stuff.

DC: OK. So your Dad got you the job there?

AL: Uh huh.

DC: Do you remember the name of the company?

AL: [stumbles a bit] Die-Matics.

DC: Die-Matics?

AL: Uh huh.

DC: OK. So he had moved there, I guess, after Midland Steel.

AL: Well yeah, he was, you know, bouncing a lot of little, little shops, and he was looking in the paper, he found that for a supervisor over there. So he was—you know, he always was supervisor off and on, so he took that job. But he didn’t stay a supervisor long there. I guess he wasn’t doing a good enough job; they got rid of him. And they kept me on and stuff, though.

DC: They did keep you on?

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK. So in the short stint he was there, he was able to get you hired in?

AL: Uh huh.

DC: All right. And then . . .

AL: But he was working in a different building than I was. They wouldn’t let us work together and stuff.

DC: Yeah, yeah. They wouldn't want him supervising you.

AL: No.

DC: So what was the job again? You told me.

AL: It was, like a grinder.

DC: Grinder, OK. Tel me exactly what you did.

AL: Well, the welders—the guys that welded the tubes together and everything else, then they would ship them down to me. I'd knock the flak off with air hammer, and they had like little beads—you had to grind them smooth and the weld beads down smooth and stuff.

DC: And what parts were these?

AL: For missile carriers.

DC: But what exactly?

AL: It's uh, like a big tube that they put the missiles in.

DC: Oh, the missiles—OK, the tube that the missiles go in. All right, I wasn't sure . . .

AL: For trans—like for transportation.

DC: OK.

AL: Transport, right? And after that I went, in that company, to—they trained me to paint—go in there and spray paint them and stuff—insides and outsides.

DC: With the same company?

AL: Uh huh?

DC: So, was that because of your painting background?

AL: No. Just promotion, go up.

DC: How did you like the grinding job?

AL: Pretty good. It wasn't bad. I was a young kid at it, young at it, and stuff. I got some stuff in my eye one time. I remember I got some stuff in my eye one time, and I thought it was welder burn, you know, flash from the welders. But my Dad took me to the hospital that night, and it was, I had a piece of steel in my eye, and he took it out, yeah. But, it was a good job. I mean, they paid me good.

DC: How did that compare to painting?

AL: Better. It was a step up.

DC: Yeah.

AL: More money. But I was working with a bunch of southern boys and stuff like that, and they would go partying down and stuff, and I said, 'No. I had enough of that partying and running around that way.' I drank, but not going partying and stuff like that with those guys. And they were older and they just wanted your money—take your money from you.

DC: How so?

AL: Oh, shooting pool and stuff. Yeah. And I said I wasn't that good of a pool shooter to be throwing my money away.

DC: Huh. So they were a little bit rougher crowd than you at that point.

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK. So you said a lot of them were from the South?

AL: Southern—southern accents and stuff. Where they were from, I don't know, but they had southern—they were good guys and everything, all family men and stuff.

DC: Uh, and so, let's see. Were you married at that point? Or was that before you got married?

AL: Before I got married, so somehow I got in there painting or somehow, I got in there, because I remember doing it. What year . . .

DC: Was that a unionized plant?

AL: No.

DC: No, OK.

AL: I didn't get into the Union until I got into Chrysler's.

DC: OK, we're heading that direction.

AL: Yeah, that's right up the road now.

DC: Yeah, it's kind of getting close. Um, so anyways, you got married in '63 or '64—we're not going to tell . . .

AL: That would be '63, because '64, Kim was born, and I was at Chrysler's in '64.

DC: OK. All right. So you got, you got married. So tell me what did you do then? Where did you live at that point?

AL: Well we had, at that time we were on Grand River. After we got married, our first place was a small apartment about a half mile from her mother's on Grand River and [pause]—no, it was not Grand River—the Boulevard. The Boulevard.

DC: The Boulevard?

AL: Yeah. Boulevard—I can't remember the cross streets. Must have been about Harper and the Boulevard.

DC: OK.

AL: We had a small apartment there for a couple months.

DC: OK, and then where did you go?

AL: After that we moved down to Warren, Michigan, on Van Dyke and Eight Mile.

DC: Van Dyke and Eight Mile, OK.

AL: And we lived ther for, oh, ten years. Ten years at that house.

DC: Did you own the house?

AL: We're buying it.

DC: You were in the process of buying it, OK. And why did you choose that area?

AL: A little safer. Get away from the rougher neighborhoods and stuff. And that's about the house we could afford at that time. It was about $10,000 or something. A small little house, but it was a nice little place.

DC: Yeah, OK. And you were working at Die-Matics at that point?

AL: No, I was out of there by that time?

DC: OK. All right.

AL: Because after I got married my wife got into Chrysler's. Until we got married.

DC: OK, so let me try to sort this out. It doesn't matter if we don't get it exactly right, but in this period, you switched jobs, then got married, and moved—a lot of stuff going on.

AL: Yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK.

AL: And we were bouncing around a lot.

DC: Yeah. Um, so anyways, how did your wife get you into Chrysler? What happened?

AL: Her uncle worked at Chrysler's. He was in engineering or something at one of the plants. And they were hiring back in '64. They were hiring really good.

DC: Um, did she have any other family members working at Chrysler?

AL: Yeah. She had an uncle—he worked at, oh, I think it was the big place right over here off of Van Dyke. It's closed down now. I even forget the name of it. But he was there—he was—he retired out of there too. All—even her cousin, or uncle—he—they all retired out of Chrysler's.

DC: OK, so she was from a Chrysler family.

AL: Uh huh.

DC: What about her Dad?

AL: No. He worked—her Dad worked for a company—they went out of business too. They screwed him over, and then he went working for a paint company.

DC: What business did he work for that went out of business?

AL: I don't know. I know he—then he went to DuPont or something, for paint. He lost that job, and she got him a bank—because she went to the—she had a bank at the Federal Reserve downtown.

DC: She was a banker?

AL: Yeah, she worked at the bank when we were married and stuff.

DC: This is your wife?

AL: Uh huh.

DC: OK, yeah.

AL: And she got a—her—him and her brother were working at the Federal Reserve.

DC: Oh really. OK.

AL: And her Dad was a maintenance—a maintenance man there. And after he was in, he got his brother—her brother in, but she couldn't work with him because she was with the money and stuff. And they were in maintenance.

DC: So was your wife working at the bank, then, when you met her?

AL: Uh, yeah.

DC: And then how did she get that job?

AL: I don't—right out of high school.

DC: Right out of high school.

AL: Or, she went to college too for awhile.

DC: OK. Where did she go to college?

AL: Must have been downtown someplace. It was, it wasn't very long. She just had a couple years of college. I don't know what college.

DC: OK. And then what exactly was her job at the Federal Reserve?

AL: [?] handling the money—and burning the money, and she did some burning of the old money, and working in the offices.

DC: I take it that must have been downtown, huh?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK. Hmm. Wow. Burning the old money.

AL: Yeah, she was telling me, it was real strict. You had to take it and burn it in the incinerators and take the ashes, you had to take the ashes and give it to the Federal Reserve, and be sure all the money was accounted for, and ashes were all—whatever they did with it.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

AL: I said, "Hell," and she still does burn money! [laughs]

DC: So anyways, you got hired in at Chrysler, in around ’64 you say.

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK. And Kim was born as well, you said, in ’64.

AL: Uh huh.

DC: OK. All right. So was she your first child?

AL: She was our only, only child.

DC: Only child. OK. All right. There we go. Um, so that’s a big—that’s a lot of changes. You’re moving, got a new job, you have a child—what was it like at that point in your life?

AL: Oh, I think not bad. I mean, it’s a part of life. You gotta—I was working. I was just happy I had a job all the time.

DC: Yeah. Did your wife stay on working?

AL: She stayed for awhile, and then, oh, I don’t even know what year she quit. She quit, and she never could stay at home. Even when Kim was born, she went to work someplace. She was working at, oh, one of these places where you order through the catalog. And she stayed there—started [hiring in?] at Christmas, and she stayed on. then finally, she went to Penney’s. She retired out of Penney’s.

DC: OK. What was she doing at Penney’s?

AL: She worked at catalog. She worked over here on—in fact we were—we moved—gee we’re still out on Van Dyke—she worked for a catalog place—I forget the name of it. And then we moved out to Sterling Heights, she went down by Lakeside. Lakeside got built, and she went there for Christmas help, and she worked there for years. Because we were there in Sterling Heights for twenty-two years, living. And then we went out to Vegas, she went out and transferred out there for awhile.

DC: OK. So you went out there for a little bit.

AL: For Penney’s.

DC: So she liked to be out, and she was working.

AL: Oh, she was a, she was a worker. She just couldn’t sit at home.

DC: So who took care of the housework and all that stuff?

AL: We both did—she, you know, mostly her, but I was working, like, midnights and she'd be working days, so we, that's how we took care of Kim.

DC: OK.

AL: At night, when I was working, she took care of Kim at night. When I got home—I took—well Kim was like in nursery school or day care and stuff like that—just drive her there, drop her off, go back home and get a couple hours sleep. Go back and pick her up, and . . .

DC: That sounds busy.

AL: We kept that way—somebody was with Kim at all times, taking care of her.

DC: Well what was your job at Chrysler?

AL: I started out in the brake shoe department.

DC: Brake shoe, OK. Tell me about it. What was it like?

AL: Oh, I started out on the assembly line. My first job—no, my first job was taking the out of the—when they came out of the oven, they came on a conveyor belt, and we used to have to take them out and sort them out, different size of shoes. So we had about eleven different size shoes. And put them on different grinders for them to grind them down, grind off the asbestos.

DC: Did you do the grinding, or did you just sort them?

AL: Eventually, but at that time, just sorting them. Take them off the conveyor, put them on the tables.

DC: Was that for different models of cars, or why did . . .

AL: Yeah, different sizes, like the eleven by threes, eleven by two and a halfs, tens, they had all kinds.

DC: So you just had to recognize them by eyesight? All the different sizes?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Oh, was that tricky?

AL: At first it was. You didn't know what you were doing at first and stuff. But you got used to it and stuff.

DC: How fast was that line moving that you had to pick them off of?

AL: It was slow, but at that time it seemed like it was going awful fast.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

AL: But it wasn't that fast. You could pick them off pretty good, because you had, like, one oven, you just come off of one oven, and they had five lines on the oven. And it was like, probably five different sizes coming off of there. But then you had to watch, because then, the lines would switch over at the other end, from the long lines to the short lines, and so then you had to watch for the short lines coming down.

DC: How many people were doing that job?

AL: Two of us.

DC: OK. Was the other person new as well?

AL: I can't remember. You're working all over the place. I mean, they had you doing that one time, and then they'd train you loading ovens and stuff.

DC: And which Chrysler plant was this?

AL: At the Gear and Axle Plant.

DC: Gear and Axle. That's right. OK, yeah.

AL: I worked there for thirty-three years.

DC: Uh hum.

AL: Same plant.

DC: Wow, OK. And you told me already, but where exactly is . . .

AL: Lynch Road and Van Dyke.

DC: Lynch Road and Van Dyke, that's right, yeah. I'll go back and listen to my tape, I'll know it all.

AL: I talk fast sometimes.

DC: Well that's OK.

AL: I jump around.

DC: Well no problem at all. You're doing fine. Um, so you started out on the brake shoe line, and how long did you stick with that?

AL: Oh, I was in the brake shoes—because I started in the front section, and then I went in the back. I was there, maybe, over twelve years.

DC: What was the difference between the front section and the back section?

AL: Well, the front is where the—well they had a bonding—they had a area where you put bonding on the shoes, and it goes from there onto another assembly line to the brake—to the ovens. And then from the ovens, you got motors [rotors?]. You put it on another conveyor that the motors get it off, and running through the ovens, you go to the people at the other end that grinds, grinds them down.

DC: So is the grinding the back section then?

AL: Front section.

DC: Oh that's the front section. OK.

AL: Uh huh. The back section is where they put the rims that are—rims and [webs?] together, weld them together. They got to go through a welder, that takes—you got a flat section and a round section, and you weld them together. That's your brake shoe. And then it goes through there and it goes through a couple of other shoes, bending them into shape, and then—uh—they got a press that punches the holes, that cut the ends off, stuff like that. [coughs loudly] Then these go to the front section where the welders were. And it's not complicated, but it was old machinery and stuff.

DC: A lot of different jobs in there, it sounds like.

AL: Uh hum. Yeah. It all depends what area you worked in. It was a small department, but all just the brake shoes.

DC: How many—or what all was produced at Gear and Axle.

AL: Oh, that was your ax—your whole rear axle.

DC: OK, whole rear axle.

AL: We did the—we made our own brakes. Uh, they had a stamping area for the, the back of the wheels. Everything was built for the axle, right there.

DC: OK, and then what? The parts would be shipped off to an assembly plant somewhere?

AL: No.

DC: No.

AL: To other parts of the plant.

DC: OK, so . . .

AL: It was all at one factory. Everything for the axle.

DC: Everything for the axle, but where would the axles go?

AL: Oh, eventually they'd be sent to assembly plants where the cars were built.

DC: Yeah, yeah, OK. That's what I was getting at. All right, so tell me what your foreman was like when you first started out.

AL: Well, foremans were—they're good people. I mean, you know, they work with you—you know you had a couple bad ones and stuff. I had a—most, 90% of the foremans I ever had in the whole factory and all, in thirty-three years, were great guys. You worked with them, you got to know their families. You know, you're a tight group and stuff.

DC: Yeah.

AL: Because, Jack Clemon [?], I see, I see his wife yet. He was—well he started out as a job setter and stuff, became a foreman, and I got to know his wife and kids and stuff. And quite a few guys, you know—I used to hang around with guys. I used to go hunting with them, from that department and stuff.

DC: Production workers?

AL: Uh huh, production workers and stuff.

DC: Is that when you first started to hunt?

AL: Yeah. I started bird hunting with one guy out there and stuff.

DC: So did you hunt when you were painting houses and stuff?

AL: No, that's when I got into Chrysler's.

DC: OK, at Chrysler you got introduced to . . . .

AL: And I started bird hunting with him, and I didn't get into deer hunting too much with those guys—and I just—well, ice fishing—I got one guy, we went ice fishing. And deer hunting started, oh geez, I think one or two times with those guys and then I just met other people that—from our camping club and stuff—met their sons and whatever, were hunters and stuff.

DC: What was the camping club?

AL: The Mount Clemens Stinkers. We started that—we started . . .

DC: The Mt. Clemens what?

AL: Stinkers.

DC: *Stinkers*. OK.

AL: And . . .

DC: Well tell me about that. What did yo do?

AL: Well first of all, me and my wife never did camp. My sister took my daughter, when she was a baby, camping one time, and that was over thirty-some years ago. I was at Chrysler's at that time. And we started with the tent camping—went from tents to trailers and to a motor home now.

DC: Uh huh. So you started the Stinkers, huh?

AL: Well, we started with—it used to be my wife and Kim, with the family and stuff, and then we met the, met the Mt. Clemens Stinkers chapter, got with them, and we would . . .

DC: So they already existed?

AL: Uh hum. Oh yeah.

DC: All right, and you got linked up with them.

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AL: Because they're always looking for new members and stuff.

DC: What kinds of activities did they do?

AL: Oh, they would have a agenda. You went to a campground—they met two or three ties a month. They would have a weekend they would go someplace. But not on—all holidays. And they always had something to do. They had like, uh, everybody would get together—potluck dinners and stuff, and well they had a meeting once a month. But at the campgrounds they had a potluck dinner, games you played, baseball. We used to play—got together, we had our own baseball team. We played against the radio station.

DC: Really?

AL: Yeah, we beat them, I think, two out of three times.

DC: How many people were in this club?

AL: Oh, it all depends. Sometimes you had, maybe, ten members, ten families. Or sometimes, up to fifteen. And sometimes—[?] it could get bigger, but that's about the biggest they got.

DC: It sounds like you enjoyed it.

AL: Oh, we had a good time with them. We learned a lot about camping. Everybody—well, we had a lot of convoys, and went out west. About four families went out west.

DC: Oh really, where you camped?

AL: Mostly we were around the area, during the year and stuff. And then—I think the first nineteen years I was working at Chrysler—about nineteen years I never took a vacation.

DC: Really, nineteen years and you didn't take a vacation.

AL: Well, not a long vacation—maybe a couple, couple days here and there and stuff. And then they talked me into going out west, me and my wife would go out with them to Yellowstone. And after that, every year I took a vacation.

DC: OK.

AL: Yeah, I was kind of leery about going, moneywise, but we had a great time out there. So we were with them for quite a few years, and I've been camping ever since.

DC: Hmm, OK.

AL: But anyways, like, they had potlucks, we played baseball, the kids—always doing something with the kids and the camp group. I mean there was people from early twenties to about sixties. And everybody acted like they were thirty years old. I mean, the older people weren't—didn't act old or nothing. They all had a good time. In fact, we still see a couple of them—the older ones, that, they come out to Arizona in the wintertime, and we go out and see them out there.

DC: Do they still camp too?

AL: They bought a motor home and everything else, but then he got, the husband got messed up with his blood and stuff, and his legs are shot. And they messed him up, and he has dialysis and stuff. They got the motor home, but they don't—probably the kids use it now, most of them.

DC: Yeah, yeah. It sounds like that was a big part of your life.

AL: Yeah, we had a good time, for getting out and stuff.

DC: I take it your wife enjoyed it as well.

AL: Oh yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK.

AL: She don't care for the tent camping too much. She said she'd never go back to a tent.

DC: Once you had a motor home, huh? Wow. All right, well, um, when you first started out on the brake shoe line, did you join the union?

AL: Oh, you gotta be in the union. At Chrysler's you had to be in the Union—no ifs, ands, or buts.

DC: No ifs, ands, or buts, OK. And you had any encounters with a union before then?

AL: No, that was the first time.

DC: OK. What did you think about, when you first joined?

AL: Something you had to do. I think our dues were five dollars a month. And it comes right out of your paycheck, and you don't even see it, and you're with the union.

DC: So it's just like, you know, something you did?

AL: Something you had to do. You wanted to work for Chrysler's, you had to be in the Union.

DC: Did you ever have any need for a committeeman, or anything like that?

AL: One, one time, and that was the worst experience I ever had.

DC: Tell me about that. What happened?

AL: Well, we were—I was in the company over ten years. They made me a job setter on the back of the line. And this guy, the older job setter, he trained me on everything. And part of our job was, on the welders, you had fingers that come down and they're copper. And they hold the part down for being welded. And when you get smashed up or something, you just, you know, take them apart, take them off, then you peel off, or break them off, and put new ones on. And we had a southern hillbilly foreman at the time that didn't care for us at all. And he—we did—were doing our job, and all of a sudden, that

night we were in the line to punch out to go home, he dragged us out of line, took us to labor relations and wanted to fire us for sabotage.

DC: Sabotage?

AL: He said we sabotaged the machine. And we had our steward there, which didn't do us a bit of good, because he was sitting there sleeping. So we had to . . .

DC: During the hearing?

AL: During the interview, yeah. So we had to fight our own battles out there, telling them, that's out job. Our job was to take the fingers off and put new ones on. It wasn't sabotage. It was a job we had to do. We did it everyday, all the time. So they finally dismissed everything.

DC: They did. OK.

AL: I made up my mind from that time, I didn't need a steward no more. I do my own fighting.

DC: Yeah. Were the stewards elected?

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK. So how did this guy get elected?

AL: Eh, there's, you know, color—he was drinking a lot. Had his buddies, and they always got into office. See I always had the same committeeman or same stewards all the time. When their tour was up and they didn't get re-elected, they went back to the line, which they didn't like that. And they had new ones come in and stuff. But anyhow, sometimes they held their office two or three elections.

DC: So this steward was a black guy, you said?

AL: Yeah. He was a good guy and everything, but he just drank a lot. And he tried to get me one time to—because he had to punch in, punch out, punch his card in—because I used to come in early, punch his card and stuff. I said, "Oh, I don't do that. I get caught, I get fired, and you ain't going to fight for me. I know that."

DC: Yeah, yeah.

AL: But ever since that time, I paid my dues and everything else, but if I had any troubles, I went and talked to the foreman or whoever, you know, man to man. I took my own battles.

DC: Why do you suppose they singled you out for this sabotage?

AL: The guy didn't like me and the other job setter—he didn't like us.

DC: A personal thing, or?

AL: Yeah, it was—he had a grudge against us. He—well he had grudges [with] a lot of people. You know, it wasn't his clique, you were out. And he thought he would just try to get rid of us.

DC: So you said your steward didn't really have any—I mean he slept through the hearings. How did you ever succeed in this?

AL: So we just told him, that, hey, come out there—and we do this job every day. That's what we do. If you want to come out and watch—talk to the other—there's two other shifts.

DC: Who were you talking to when you were making your case?

AL: To labor relations people. And we told them, "Hey talk to the other shifts. They do the same thing as we're doing." And . . .

DC: Did they do that? Or don't you know?

AL: I don't know, but they knew about—Ray Allen was the foreman that was trying to get us fired. They knew him and stuff too. So after that, they go through the hearing, and dismissed everything.

DC: OK. So how did you feel during that time?

AL: Well, I never liked him before that, and I didn't like him after that.

DC: Did you have to work under him more after that?

AL: Yeah, I did my job. That's what I was being paid for, figured just do what I do.

DC: How did he treat you after that?

AL: Ah, he gave me a rough time and stuff, but you just do your job. He can't do nothing when you do your job. And we just did it a little slower, that's all.

DC: Did you. OK.

AL: Yeah. Slow her down. Made him lose his production, and the front office, or the super—uh, committee—not the committeeman, but the General Foreman sees that he's losing his, and why? Hey, he wants to play us dirty, we'll play him dirty.

DC: Sure, yeah. So the job, it was a job setting position?

AL: Uh huh.

DC: Was it something you wanted to do or did they—did he just shift you back there?

AL: No, I was in fact—usually you don't become a job setter here [until] after you got twenty years with the company or something. It's a promotion deal and stuff. And you got to go down by seniority. But Bob Watson was the foreman, and he must have liked me or something, and he weaseled me in there after ten years of seniority, into the job. Because I guess, they figured I knew about machinery. And I was good with it. I was good with machinery. The guy I was being—that Eddie Lejeck[?], he was the one who trained me and everything else. He was like a Dad to me, showed me everything.

DC: So what position did Eddie have?

AL: Job setter.

DC: Oh he was a job setter already. OK. So he just kind of took you under his wings then?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. All right.

AL: Trained me on all that stuff.

DC: Did you know him beforehand?

AL: No. Just in the factories. Worked on lines underneath him and stuff like that.

DC: OK, so he knew a little bit about who you were before you got that job?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. Huh.

AL: After that we got close. He got to know my family and stuff. He knew Kim, come over to the house for dinner and stuff like that. Because he was divorced and everything. And he showed me a lot of tricks about—because we had some old machinery in there. Man, we had to use tongs to hold the parts in, and then you hit a foot pedal to machine the cycle. A lot of times the machine, you had your tongs in there, the machine would cycle automatically.

DC: Whoa.

AL: That why you never put your hands into those machines.

DC: Wow. That's why you had to have those tongs.

AL: Yeah.

DC: Yeah,.

AL: Yeah, it smashed a lot of tongs.

DC: Really. Wow.

AL: Everybody knew them machines were dangerous. So they knew better than to stick their hands in or through or stuff. I even seen people on—that was the old brake line—that used to be for truck shoes. But them, the other lines were for the car shoes. And you had big [restrikes?] in there, that, I mean, big [tong?] machine come down out of this die, and it formed a shoe around the bottom die, so it was making it rounder. I seen guys that were jammed up on the other side, and sometimes you'd take a stick and try to push them through. I seen guys stick their hands in there. I said, "Don't you ever stick you hand in there! That clutch let go, your hand won't be nothing left."

DC: Did you ever see anyone get hurt?

AL: Um, uh, I didn't see—a job setter got hurt in the back, but I didn't see it happen. That happened between him and a crane operator. They were putting a die in—he had a machine here, another one in back, and the crane operator's looking this way trying to look over this machine. Well he's supposed to have a guide telling the crane operator what to do. But the crane operator was an old guy—they used to call him Doc—and he drank a lot. And you never put your hands on top of a die and push it into the machine. You're supposed to, you know, [fist it?], or push it in that way.

DC: No fingers exposed, you mean?

AL: Yeah, he had them on top, and Doc lifted the die up, and caught it between the machine and the die.

DC: Oh man.

AL: Cut his fingers right off.

DC: Mmm.

AL: They didn't blame Doc, but it was his fault. He's supposed to be watching the ground guy. And the job setter's supposed to be telling him what to do, and he's [not] supposed to have his hands in there—so everybody was making mistakes.

DC: Hmm. That's a costly mistake. So what, um, trying to think, what was your work group like? I mean, in there. What kinds of things did you do? You mentioned that when your boss tried to mess with you, you messed back, but I mean, how did you guys get along? How did you deal with the day and all? What did you do together?

AL: Well, when we used to—a lot of times we'd like, we'd bring in spare ribs and stuff, and we used to cook them in the ovens.

DC: Oh really.

AL: Yeah, we put 'em on, raw meat and stuff, we'd put them on the oven, and we knew to send it three times through and it'd be cooked.

DC: Is that right?

AL: Yeah, we had it all timed up. The colored guys were bringing the sauce in, we was putting the barbecue sauce on it and stuff. We're—it was a good group.

DC: Yeah. Uh huh. You had blacks and whites working together in there?

AL: Oh yeah. It was all mixed up and all that stuff. All the way through Chrysler's, you know. Which at the beginning wasn't bad. You had a good group in there, you know. At that time, in '64 they started hiring off the street, and they were hiring a lot of people. And so the people in the shop, there were the old group already, they were bringing all these new ones in. They were treating us good. There was no favoritism. They were training us all, showing us what to do, which was pretty good. And everybody worked together. But then down the line, we got, you know, they started separating a little bit.

DC: The two groups, by seniority?

AL: Oh, you started meeting your friends, different friends—not, you know, but younger ones your age. Like they had a cement room where they put—in that department, where they put the glue on the shoes for bonding. And that was like a, like a little hotel. And I—well, I was a job setter. I used to job-set there, different areas where they needed you at different times. And those are the guys I used to go hunting with, or fishing with—our families got together. It was about six or seven of us. And got together that way. And we'd hang around that way. But work-wise, everybody took—like one time, I was a job setter on the welders, and Pete [Banky?], he was a job setter in the back on the [blanking?] area. Well I job-setted over there awhile. And it was wintertime, and it was cold. They had these big space heaters. And they had thermostats on them. So Pete was over there—it was cold back, because it was the train doors. I went by his thermostat and turned it down [laughs]. And he said he was freezing his butt off. He got a hold of the skilled trade, and tried to figure out what was the matter with them. For two days he froze. We still laugh about it. I said, "You ever check the thermostat?"

DC: [laughs]

AL: Well you know, we used to play jokes like that and stuff.

DC: Yeah. What other kinds of jokes did you play?

AL: Uh, that was one that I always got them were, you know, hide somebody's lunches or something like that. Back in the beginning, the factories were cold. They didn't have no air conditioning in the summer, and no heating in the winter. It was bad. And we used to take 55-gallon drums, set them on fire, just to keep warm. We were, you were wearing your [?] coat, from your home, and you were wearing it all day.

DC: Oh really. OK.

AL: Yeah, factory conditions were bad back then. Of course it was an old factory. Like I said, when I was a kid I used to hear those factories when I was sleeping at night. I was just two blocks away from that. And we beared through it, and the company, you know the union and the company got together, they started setting the stuff up. They got heaters in for us, and eventually got air conditioning going for us and stuff like that.

DC: When was that do you think?

AL: Just from the beginning, just little by little, improving the conditions and stuff. Every time they had a contract come up, improved the conditions in the factory. And it was safer for everybody too. Got better machinery—well, that's down the line. Like now, we got better, new machinery.

DC: About how far down the line before you got the better machinery?

AL: The last, maybe, five, six years. But that was in another department. I was in—I went from the brake shoe department—I went to assembly lines for the axles. I was there for a couple years. I used to, every couple of years, start moving around. You got bored, I moved.

DC: OK, would you bid on different jobs?

AL: Yeah, always different jobs. And it seemed like I'd always get on a job that the foreman, the other foremans got to know me and stuff. I'd be on assembly for a couple months and they'd get me out of there, job setter or repairman. I was, like in the axle department, when it settled, I was on the repair lines. They had me in the back for repairing.

DC: What was that like? Tell me about that?

AL: Well, when you get an axle with a defect or something on it, something wrong, or it wasn't completely built—they put it on the side, and they sent it to the repair areas.

DC: OK, so you'd have to correct the problems?

AL: Uh huh. Just rebuild them or something, whatever was wrong with them.

DC: How did you like that?

AL: It was good. It was a good job. Wasn't no assembly line—that's the main thing.

DC: OK, so you wanted to be off the assembly line?

AL: Oh yeah. I don't see how those people could stand working thirty years on a assembly line.

DC: Were there some who were doing that?

AL: Oh yeah. Some people would just sit there, every—five, six, days, whatever, five days a week, putting screws in these covers. Ten, twelve screws in. I don't know how they could stand doing that every day. Me, I had to be busy, doing something, or doing nothing, one or the other.

DC: Yeah, it's just not the same thing, anyways, I guess. Uh, was there any monotony with the brake shoe line job?

AL: No, that was—only monotony was that loading the ovens. You had to stay in there—everybody got a callous on the side of their foot because he had—you leaned against the bars when you're loading the machines, the ovens. Because you had to take your brake shoe, and then your lining, and put it on, take a bar, or a clamp, clamp it down, bar lock it down. We used to, just stood there all day doing it.

DC: So that motion, you'd get kind of tired of . . .

AL: Oh, after awhile you get to the point where, I built my whole basement sitting there thinking about how to do a basement.

DC: You could be gone mentally, and think about other things.

AL: Yeah, because you got the routine, really locking them down. So I got involved, down the line, to different departments and different places, with the—about like, on the welder, you could sit on the welder and listen to it, and don't even look at it, and you know if something went wrong. Because you could—the times—like it would skip something. In your mind, there's something wrong—it didn't do the same thing again.

DC: So it was almost your sub-conscious would pick it up?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Wow.

AL: So we had a big meeting on—I mentioned about that to the meeting—and one colored guy said, "Oh, you can't do those." "Yes you can." I wasn't going to argue the point. I knew I could sit on the welder and almost sleep, and know when that machine messed up, because it's just a routine you go through.

DC: Uh, did—you said that blacks and whites worked throughout the plant. Was there any—were there any jobs that were more specifically reserved for blacks and some for whites?

AL: No, because everything was by seniority. If you had the seniority and you had the qualifications—and at the end you didn't have the qualifications, but you had, they kept on training them and stuff.

DC: What about women? Were there any women working in there?

AL: Oh yeah. We had women mostly on the, uh, in the brake shoe department on the front, unloading the ovens.

DC: How did the men and women get along in the factory?

AL: Good. You know, there were—a lot of them were in [minority??] groups and stuff. Even—nobody ever know about racism—well, they had trouble, a little bit and stuff. Further down the line, we had a lot of trouble about race, and when you hired the hard-core . . .

DC: Hired the hard-core?

AL: Yeah.

DC: What do you mean by that?

AL: Well the government was paying Chrysler's to take the hard-core, you know, the people off the streets, that weren't high-school diploma—that didn't have no education. They couldn't even sign their name, some of them.

DC: Yeah.

AL: Hired them and brought them in the factories. That's when Chrysler almost went bankrupt, back in the '70s.

DC: OK.

AL: And they had to teach them how to read a time clock, or a clock to get up and come to work.

DC: Oh really.

AL: It was, it was just like—I won't say it was all there—but there was people that didn't, didn't want to work, but the government made them go to work, and Chrysler's got paid to take them in. And that almost was their doom, because people wouldn't come to work

DC: Hmm. Sounds like a big change.

AL: Yeah, it was. It was—production went down. We were losing our production, because they didn't care if they make it right or not and stuff.

DC: Were those mostly black workers, or were they white and black workers?

AL: Oh, mixed. There was—they were mostly from downtown Detroit people came in there and stuff.

DC: How would they get to work?

AL: Bus.

DC: All right.

AL: Yeah. They didn't own no cars or nothing like that.

DC: How did they get along with the established workers?

AL: Ahh, they couldn't take the—how the—we'd tell them how to do the job, and stuff. They were saying no. They, they don't do it that way. It wasn't good. They wanted to do it their way, and they don't care if it was right, wrong, or whatever. And a lot of times they would sabotage—they would sabotage the machines, double hit something, you know, crash the dies and stuff—which made us mad because we had to change them all the time then.

DC: OK, made more work for you.

AL: Yeah.

DC: Hmm, sounds like a huge change then.

AL: Well, eventually Chrysler solved their mishap by hiring them, and they finally got weeded out and stuff. They didn't, they didn't—I'd say 90 percent of them never did make a retirement out of the company's. They didn't want to work. The government actually forced them off of welfare and stuff to go to work. And they didn't want—they wanted to stay there at home and get their money.

DC: Hmm.

AL: And it wasn't a good—that's after that shooting and stuff—we had a lot of them in the shop.

DC: OK, tell me about the shooting.

AL: Well that happened on Chet's birthday and stuff—Chet Clemons[?] birthday and . . .

DC: Was he one of the workers, Chet Clemon?

AL: Yeah, he was a supervisor and stuff. And I knew his family and stuff. He was—came up the ranks, like job setter, from worker to job setter to foreman. That's how they usually did it. They tried to do it, hiring in-plant. That way, it was better for everybody in that they knew the jobs, and they knew the people. The people would have no hard feelings that they got promoted and stuff. In fact, there's a lot of benefits that way too.

DC: The benefits being?

AL: Better jobs. If you were qualified, and he knew you were qualified, he'd give you a better job to work on. Or he knew a job you could go on and do, and stuff.

DC: Anyways, it was Chet Clemons' birthday when the shooting.

AL: Yeah, because that's how I remember the shooting. I don't know what date it was, but I remember it was on Chet Clemons' birthday, because he was supposed to work that night too, but they went home, while he goes—he didn't go home; he goes always to the VFW Club, and then he goes home. And when he got home—I understand when he got home, his wife said it was on the news and stuff.

DC: Was that your plant then?

AL: It was my department.

DC: Your department.

AL: I was supposed to work with those people that night. Yeah, I was scheduled to job set cementing room that night, with them. And—because the job setter didn't show up in time for us to go home. So I was—then I was there for a little while, and then he came in . . .

DC: So you would have had to hang on, to hang in there and stay around, or you might have anyway?

AL: Yeah, I would have been there during the shooting and stuff. But he came in and I went home. And by the time I got home, the shooting took effect already and stuff. And I knew all those guys, the ones who got shot.

DC: Who were they?

AL: Well, the guy who was doing the shooting, he worked in the cement room, which was—everybody wants to work there because it was a good job. And—his name was Johnson, and a real quiet guy. I mean, a good guy, just quiet.

DC: Had you known him at all?

AL: Yeah, I knew him. Not personally, but I talked to him, knew him, because he wasn't—he didn't socialize a lot. He just came in, did his job—I mean, a good guy. Did his job, and that was it.

DC: Yeah.

AL: And he was being messed with at that time.

DC: How was he being messed with?

AL: Well, his job was in the cement room. They wanted to take him out—well what it was, was the day's foremans—one was—Bob Watson was the General Foreman—and what the hecks the other foreman was—I remembered it the other day. Huh. Anyways, they told the foremans on second shift to take him out, put him on a different job and stuff. And he said, no, he had the seniority to be there, and he messed with him, pulled him out, put him on another job. He got mad, went home, came back with a rifle, started shooting. They shot the wrong guys. He couldn't find the ones, the day foremans, so he took it out on the other ones. It was, Gary Hines—he was a supervisor in the back. He got shot on top of a welder. And one job setter in the front, on the ovens—his name was John—a big Polish name—his initials was JFK—I remember on his lunchbox, JFK. His name was John something. And he got it when—his mistake was he went and tried to talk to Johnson to put down the gun and stuff. He just turned and shot him. And it was a colored foreman—he was brand new to the department—don't even know his name. He was there about a month or so. And he got hit about between two of the ovens, got him. But it was over a dumb thing that somebody else caused, and three men died that had nothing to do with it. They were just following orders that they had—told them to do anything about it. But Gary Hines, the one that was on the back, he was the best foreman you could have thought. He'd never get nobody in trouble. Did everything for the men. His men. And just got shot.

DC: Why do you suppose they messed with Johnson's job?

AL: Ah, just wanted to probably take him out of the [?], put him someplace else, and, which his right was, if he had the seniority to be inside there. They were just trying to get him on another job and have somebody else go in there.

DC: Yeah.

AL: And good thing, because—what the heck was his name—used to grow up—I grew up with the guy—kid too. Jack [?]. Jack—I know it was Jack—He's a big guy. Anyway, he said he ran out the back door. When the shooting took off, he went out the back door. And he was trying to find somebody, to get one of the guns out of our lockers to go—was a lot of guns in the shop at that time.

DC: I was going to ask you that.

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

AL: . . . but, because guys cashing checks and stuff, and he had bodyguards.

DC: So who was cashing the checks?

AL: Some colored guy on skilled trade. And you know, he was a good guy and everything else. He was just—he'd cash your check, for, like your check was like a hundred and ten dollars and fifty cents. He'd give you a hundred and ten dollars and he'd keep the fifty cents. He kept all the change parts. If it was a penny, he got a penny. If it was ninety-nine cents, he got ninety-nine cents.

DC: So that was his take on it?

AL: Yeah.

DC: OK. So was this cheaper than going to the bank, or quicker?

AL: Yeah, because the guys had money right out when he goes to the bar in the afternoon, whatever, you had your check cashed.

DC: So in order to protect the flow of cash, people have guns in the plant?

AL: Oh, he had bodyguards.

DC: They had bodyguards, OK.

AL: Yeah, guys that walked around.

DC: Did they work in the plant too?

AL: Oh yeah. They all work—all workers in the factories.

DC: And so, who got shot that time?

AL: Just a shooting. Nobody got killed or nothing, just a shooting and stuff. [??]

DC: So in other words, there was a lot of—there were a lot of guns. There was some. . .

AL: That were in the shop, yeah.

DC: There was stuff going on. Yeah. Did you think it was a tense place to work?

AL: Was it a tense place? We had the hard-core in there. At the time that the shooting with [?], that was the hard-core in there, cause that one guy, was—the jury came through about the case—they told everybody in the factory, keep their mouth shut. Stay away from everything else. And there were—one guy was leaving notes on the job for the jury could see it and stuff, that it was racism and stuff like that. Which I don't believe it was racism. It was a colored guy and everything else, but it wasn't actually a racism situation.

DC: Were there other people who had been messed with like that?

AL: Oh yeah. They did it to me. They did it to everybody. Put you on different jobs. They did things—nobody wanted to load the oven. But somebody had to do it. And they'd put you—if that was your job, and you trained for it, you had to go do it. Then you'd try to work to get off that job to get another job in the back or something. That's just part of the race, you know, the situation to do there.

DC: Yeah, yeah. Uh . . .

AL: But I don't think Johnson—his job was in the cement room. He should have been left alone.

DC: Yeah, he shouldn't have been moved. Yeah. Was Johnson one of the hard-core?

AL: No. No. He was an old-timer, but not old-timer, younger, my age and stuff, at that time. And that was his job to be in the cement room—worked up his seniority to put him in there, stuff. And somebody just had a bug that day to try to move him off, and whatever.

DC: So what was it like working in that department afterwards?

AL: It was a little tense, but after the jury and after the trial and everything else, everything got back to normal.

DC: What did you all think about the trial?

AL: Well, [short pause] I think he got a little bit of a runaround and stuff. He got—they put him in a mental hospital, and the company was paying him. That's what I didn't like about it. They were paying him—Union worked out a deal that he would get a, not

whole pay, but he was getting paid, and stuff. I said that, in other words, I figured he got killed—he got paid for killing three people. Which, but, he was actually pushed into it and stuff. It's—which—I had nothing to do with it, so I just stayed away from it. None of my business.

DC: But what were people saying around the department? There must have been some talk about it.

AL: Well, most of it was talk about Gary Hines' wife. He got shot and the next day she was down trying to get his insurance money and stuff. Oh yeah, she was around. The next day the front office, trying to figure out how to get his insurance money from the company and stuff. Nobody dies in the factory, you ever know. Nobody ever dies in a factory. You always die at the hospital. No matter what.

DC: Is that what happened here too?

AL: Oh yeah. My Dad was telling me stories when he's seen guys crushed. Bodies were just nothing in big machines, and they were declared at the hospital, dead.

DC: So what's your theory here?

AL: You can't sue the company.

DC: OK.

AL: That's the main thing.

DC: So you're saying that—were they claiming that the injuries weren't caused at work?

AL: Well, caused at work, but they didn't die at work.

DC: Oh.

AL: And stuff. They died at the hospital. My Dad said he seen, I don't know—my Dad was telling me, whether it's a true story or not—guy got crushed by a big press. My Dad was, I guess, at Midland Steel—had a big press that was bending steel and stuff. And the guy was—[??] press. The press came down, and they had to take a hose to wash him out. There was nothing left. But declared him dead at the hospital. I seen, well, we had one guy, [Ed Deflits?], he fall off a jitney or something, and he called for the doctor to come out there. The doctor and nurse come out to the floor—and we had some quack doctors in there. Oh! The nurse went over to take care of the guy, and the doctor stood in the back. Wouldn't even go by the guy. He was having an epileptic fit. They had some real winners as doctors.

DC: Wow. So not a lot of faith there, huh?

AL: No.

DC: Were there different reactions to the Johnson, you know, shooting? I mean, from within your department?

AL: Yeah, well the whites were one way and the blacks were, you know, justified that he did it justified, and stuff. And we said, if it was justified, he killed the wrong guys. They had nothing to do with the situation—was the daytime foremans and everything, nothing to do with the afternoon people.

DC: Yeah, that was a different crew.

AL: Yeah, because he—Johnson was an afternoon guy. But the day—your General Foreman is on days, and—I forget that foreman's name. He was a big guy. He was, he wasn't well-liked by a lot of people. He was real hard-nosed and stuff, but he give the orders to come down to the second-shift foremans, to pull the guy out for some reason. It was just down the chain of command, and it was a messed deal all the way around.

DC: Do you think it might just as well have been someone else that day?

AL: He come looking for, uh, the daytime foremans and stuff.

DC: I guess what I meant was, uh, uh, when they, uh, moved Johnson off the job that he rightfully had, were they looking for Johnson or just anyone to run the different job?

AL: Looking for somebody else—special person to run that job. One of their favorites to put in there.

DC: OK, I see.

AL: Which it was Johnson's job.

DC: OK, so that's what they wanted to do. They wanted to . . .

AL: Pull him out and put one of their guys in on that day for some reason.

DC: Oh, I see.

AL: That's what I understood that they did.

DC: OK, that was the thinking in your crowd anyway. When you say that blacks and whites responded differently to the trial . . .

AL: Oh yeah, blacks were for Johnson, and whites were—that he killed some innocent guys for no reason, because Gary Hines was really liked by everybody. He was . . .

DC: Did the black workers tend to like him too?

AL: Oh no, they liked him. But he was just in the wrong spot, the wrong spot at the wrong time, which he was. But there was no sense in shooting him. He had nothing to do with the situation.

DC: How did that play out then in your department. Did you just agree to disagree, or was there tension?

AL: Oh, a little tension for a little while, and then everything just settled down—everybody did, did your job. Like you're being that—part of your family—it's your family in the factory, but it ain't your main family, because everybody got along pretty good in the factories and stuff.

DC: Uh huh. And you said—were you still living in Warren at the time?

AL: No, at that time I was in Sterling Heights.

DC: When did you move?

AL: It had to be about—we were about eight, nine years at Warren, so that had to be in the '70s.

DC: OK. Tell me about your Warren neighborhood. What was that like, and the house where you lived there?

AL: It's an old neighborhood. Uh, well, they had young people moving in. Our neighbors were young, you know. One side was young; the other side was older couple.

DC: OK, so in transition then?

AL: Yeah, we had all over, mixed, mixed in Warren there.

DC: Mixed by age, or mixed by race, or how?

AL: Age.

DC: Age, OK.

AL: Yeah. It was all whites out in that area.

DC: OK, yeah.

AL: And it was an older neigh—in Warren, that's the first block off Eight Mile Road. It's the older part of Warren. And houses, you'd see a couple—they had a couple houses condemned in that area, but it wasn't bad. It wasn't a bad area.

DC: Why did you decide to move to Sterling Heights?

AL: Farther away. No coloreds. Farther away, and more richy area. Stuff, you know, like going up, up the ladder. Just working our way up.

DC: So were black families moving closer to Warren then?

AL: Oh, they were on the borderline of Eight Mile Road.

DC: OK, yeah. And you wanted to move away from those neighborhoods?

AL: Well, we wanted a bigger house. It was a—it was a nice house. It was two bedrooms, then they added a room in the back for a bigger laundry room, and another bedroom. But it had no garage. It was a nice piece of property, nice area, but we wanted to go up. So we got a bigger two-story—it was a quad. A bigger home, garage we had built and stuff like that.

DC: There were a lot of black workers at the plant. Where did they live?

AL: Detroit—Detroit area. Out around there.

DC: Did you ever go to their houses, or did they ever go to your houses?

AL: No. No. I didn't—I don't hang around with them. I was more like a racist myself. I worked with them and everything else, but I didn't associate with them.

DC: Uh huh.

AL: I didn't never let them know when I was in the factory, I was a racist, stuff like that.

DC: So you say you were a racist. What did that mean? I mean . . .

AL: I had nothing to do with the blacks. I worked with them. I mean I had a lot of friends, blacks, in fact right at the end, I was working in—on the, the CNC machines. There was one job setter on midnights, we were pretty close and stuff, black guy and stuff. And when he went on vacation, he brought stuff, gifts back. And when we, me and John, on our vacation, we brought him—he was—he wasn't a black. He was a colored guy.

DC: What, what was the difference?

AL: Well, you got your niggers, they call them niggers—that's the low—didn't know how to—that was the hard-core. They didn't want to work. They didn't care. They hated themselves. Then you had the blacks, and then you had the colored people, and it was stuff like that—they were nicer.

DC: What was the difference between the blacks and the coloreds? I'm . . .

AL: Well, the black and the colored are about the same, but they were, they didn't act trashy. They had better homes, they worked hard for a living, had good wives and kids, just like a white person and stuff. But they were still blacks, stuff, so—there's nothing *wrong* with them, but just, we didn't hang around with them and stuff.

DC: And was there any—were there any whites in your plant who did hang around with blacks?

AL: Uh, yeah. Not many, but they were on their side, we were on our side, and stuff. And we all worked together and stuff. That's the main thing. But even like, now I'm out in Vegas. The blacks out there are real good people. You got them Mexicans that are the trashy ones out there. And they don't work. They'd rather steal from you than work. And the blacks are—I mean, there were—I wouldn't mind having them over for dinner and stuff. Come over and stuff. They're real nice people. It's a, it's—Detroit coloreds are brought up different. Well, even down South, the blacks are—they, you know, they're lower, not lower, but they're a poorer class of people. They're good family people. The people in Detroit, it seems like, blacks don't even like blacks themselves. And stuff. You go, like, out west, and you meet people in other towns—Detroit—some reason, Detroit breed people, they don't want to work and stuff. They want everything given to them. Out west, they work for a living.

DC: Did the black folks in your plant work hard?

AL: Oh yeah, they were hard workers and stuff. They had good families and stuff. There was, you know, probably some of them that were not, but most of them had good families. They stayed—you know they stayed with their side, their people and stuff—like we weren't invited to their places neither. Which is—when you're at work, you work together. When you walk out the door, you go your different ways. Like if you had trouble, you could be real friendly with a black guy in the shop. When you walk out the front door, and there'd be two colored guys looking for you, or get in a fight with you, that colored guy wouldn't stick up for you, because you're outside of the plant. Inside of the plant would be a different story.

DC: Hmm, two different worlds.

AL: Yeah.

DC: Was it always that way when you were working?

AL: Uh huh.

DC: OK.

AL: Yeah. Like I said, now, one time we were over there and, uh, working with the ring gears and pinions, that guy on midnights. He was the best guy you could meet in there and stuff, but to [?], you walk out that door, he wouldn't, you know, he wouldn't stick up for you.

DC: So that was near the end of your work?

AL: Yeah, I retired—he was still working. He was ready to get out. He couldn't get out—he adopted a lot of kids and stuff. He had adoptions where he took care of kids, him and his wife. She worked in the factory too.

DC: So—she did too, OK.

AL: Yeah, different departments though. She was a real nice woman too. Heavy-set woman and everything else, but real, real friendly. Real nice.

DC: Did she work at the same factory?

AL: Uh hum. We had a lot of them—not a lot—we had a couple family, you know, husband and wives working in the factories, different departments and stuff.

DC: And you said that around this time your wife was working at various jobs and ended up at Penney's did you say?

AL: Uh hum. J.C. Penney's. She was in catalog. She worked in catalog over a year at Lakeside. Most all the time she was at Penney, and when she went out west, they didn't have any openings in catalog, so she went on the floor, and she just loved working on the floor then. And they wanted to get her back in catalog, but she said, "No. I'll stay on the floor working."

DC: OK, so she ended up being on the floor.

AL: Yeah.

DC: Uh, one thing I forgot to ask, did you ever, um, get involved in any veterans' organizations or use any GI Bill benefits or anything like that?

AL: Yeah. When I bought my house—finally, when I bought a house out in Vegas, I went to the GI Loan.

DC: Oh, with the Vegas house, OK, but not in Warren or Sterling Heights?

AL: I went FHA out here all the time.

DC: FHA, OK. Uh huh.

AL: Somebody told me, 'Why don't you use your GI Loan, your Veteran's, because it only cost you a dollar for a down payment and stuff. I always had the money, and so I went FHA. And so that's the only time I ever used anything from the service, is when I went out to Vegas.

DC: So you didn't join any of the other organizations or anything, veterans organizations?

AL: No, I [?] with the Union. Out there we have a retiree Union and stuff.

DC: Oh, what Local is it, by the way?

AL: Oh, I don't even know the number. It's all—anybody that belonged to a UAW—Ford, General Motors, Chrysler's, Caterpillar—anybody that belonged to General Motors . . .

DC: Out in Vegas?

AL: Uh hum.

DC: OK, all right. I gotcha.

AL: And they had one—about twelve hundred members out there.

DC: Really? Wow.

AL: Which isn't very big.

DC: Well, yes and no. That's good size, actually. I go to these retiree luncheons at Local 653, Pontiac Motor . . .

AL: Well that's—they're a company. They're factory. This is like—ours, we got, well at the Gear and Axle Plant, we had about four thousand guys working there at one time. Well, the UAW got more power out of here than they do out west.

DC: Oh yeah. You're like refugees, just getting together as retirees, right?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Yeah.

AL: We don't get—our benefits—we get the same benefits and everything else, but like our Blue Cross and everything else, it's harder for them—the people want you to be out there, and not go through—they don't want to be bothered with going to like the Blue Cross and stuff like that.

DC: Uh, while you were working, how did you feel about the benefits you got through your union contracts?

AL: Well, we always got good benefits. The only thing, you had—a couple times we lost benefits, which—I made that—when I was—in fact I went to the Detroit News—I even mentioned that about that.

DC: Yeah, tell me more about that.

AL: Well, I can't remember about it too—I remember telling the reporter that our fathers—which is my father and the people in the plants fought for the union for different rights and everything else, to get better benefits. And down the line now, after ten, fifteen years, we're giving up benefits, which I don't think is right.

DC: Are you talking about the late '70s or so there? Or what period was this when you were making that case?

AL: About middle'70s, around there.

DC: Middle '70s, OK.

AL: I wish I had brought that paper.

DC: Yeah, I'd like to see it sometime. Was that before or after Lee Iacocca got involved and stuff?

AL: Before Iacocca, yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK. So there was already a trend towards giving back benefits, or cutting back benefits.

AL: Yeah, yeah. Well you always, you know, you always—the Company'd want to give us something, or take something away, like a big thing come up when General Motors—I remember that one. General Motors said there—they didn't have—well this is back—had to be the '80s or so. They—for cost of living, they said they couldn't give the workers cost of living because they didn't have the money, and two months later—that was when around contract time—and two months later all their big shots got bonuses. And then the Union stepped in and said, "Wait a minute. You got no money for giving up, but you're giving bonuses to all your big shots." So they got their cost of living and everything.

DC: Yeah. What was it like, uh, you know, when Chrysler was on the verge of bankruptcy? What was it like working there?

AL: Oh, it was scary. You know, we were scared to lose our jobs and everything else. Yeah.

DC: Were you ever laid off in that time?

AL: Yeah, I got laid off, a couple months—but I didn't know that I was getting—well, I always—when you got laid off, you always knew you'd get back, except that—a couple times I got scared when you're out a couple months, and then the Company was going, you know, under.

DC: Yeah, I was going to say, were you sure the Company would even survive.

AL: And we didn't know.

DC: Yeah.

AL: And Iacocca came in there, and helped bail us out and stuff. Everybody, you know—which he did a good job, you know, so that's—but I still say the Company never would have went under. I mean, I think—For and General Motors have to have competition. And the government was going to keep us in there one way or the other, to keep prices—for when they couldn't gouge us and stuff.

DC: So you think that even without Iacocca and what he did, there would have been some kind of bail-out?

AL: My feeling is they would have, but you know, maybe I don't give Iacocca enough credit and stuff, but he did the Company good. But he got paid, he got paid good too. He got his—he didn't get no wage—like a dollar in wages—but he got enough stocks and everything else that he can live for a long time.

DC: What was it like in your neighborhood at that point, though, when Chrysler was, you know, teetering like that?

AL: People, uh, people didn't realize—even like out West—the people don't realize that the Company—if the auto company's going down, it affects everybody. A lot of people say, "No, it don't." But it does. If your auto company, your people get laid off and stuff, it affects everybody. It affects the stores, and it affects your barber. Because if somebody doesn't come get a haircut because they worked at the auto plant, can't afford to get a haircut.

DC: Did a lot of people in your neighborhood work at Chrysler?

AL: A lot of people in the Detroit area works for the auto companies.

DC: Sure, but I mean in Sterling Heights and Warren, did a lot of those folks in particular work at Chrysler?

AL: No, they worked for Chrysler's, General Motors—it was like salt and pepper, whatever, just scattered all over.

DC: Did you ever look for a different job at that point in time?

AL: No.

DC: OK.

AL: I was just going down and get my unemployment check—stay in line. I wasn't really worried about getting laid off, because I had enough seniority that they were going to pick me up someplace. Because the other plants were, you know, they were laying off, but they were going by seniority, calling people back. So I was, I was pretty, I never worried too much about that.

DC: Did it help that your wife was working as well?

AL: Ah, she was, she was bringing some money. She wasn't getting paid a whole lot there. We made, we made our money from Chrysler's, especially the last seven years. I was, I was working seven days a week, eleven hours a day.

DC: Really.

AL: Yeah, I was bringing a grand home a week, clear.

DC: Overtime?

AL: Yeah. Uh huh. Like I said, after I went from the assembly, axle assembly, I went down to test driving. It was about four or five of us guys were in the back, we'd take an axle off the line, take them to the garage, and we'd put them on cars, and we'd take them on the road and test them for noise and stuff. I worked there for a couple years, but there was no overtime. So I got out of there. Then I got in ['83?] Department, working as a job setter over there. On pinions and ring gears, for the axle and stuff. And that's where I met John, at my last ten, twelve years working there with him. And John, he was a job setter, he trained me over there.

DC: The one you talked about earlier.

AL: Yeah, that passed away. He retired—a year later he died. We were close, I mean, family-wise. We still see his wife and stuff. But we went on vacation together and stuff like that. But he was one of the guys that would show you everything. And we got new machinery—came out—we got the new CNC machines, was like night and day.

DC: Tell me about that. What was the CNC?

AL: CNC was like a big lathe, and it would cut the pinions, and they—well they had a different CNC for in the back—[acumas?], they called them.

DC: What was that?

AL: The company—[Coomah?]

DC: Coomah [sp?]. OK.

AL: And they were designed to cut the ring gears and pinions and stuff. And they're all computerized, so once you got the programs and everything—most of the—we sat back and read books all day.

DC: OK, so you enjoyed that?

AL: Oh yeah. Me and John just sit there, and we'd just sit back and do nothing. When we had the old ones, you're always—they're falling apart. They were put together with baling wire and stuff. It was—same machine, but different company and stuff. And they were old, falling apart. They wouldn't hold sides and stuff, so you had to fight with them all the time.

DC: So how long had those old machines been in place?

AL: Oh they were in there [pause] years and years. Before I even got in the department they were in there and stuff.

DC: So the CNC machine was something that came in the '90s then?

AL: Yeah, yeah. The last, oh, five or six years, before I got out and stuff.

DC: And you got in, what, '97 did you say?

AL: Ninety, '98 I think.

DC: '98, OK. Wow. Uh, so anyways, did you have to learn any of the programming at all for the CNC machine?

AL: Oh, at that time I worked with the—John and the engineers. We had two engineers in there, every time I had a problem, I didn't go to skilled trade. I went right to the engineers, and they came out help me, got me, you know, straightened out on it and stuff. And all your machines had the same programs in them, so if you had one machine lost it, you went to another machine and you can look it up and put it back in.

DC: OK.

AL: In case somebody, you know, which it happened. We had new job setters on the other shifts that didn't know what they were doing, and they'd delete a section out of the program out, and the machine wouldn't work right, so—so go on a break, and me and John were one of the better ones doing that. Well John was the best. And we knew to go to the other machines, and we'd type up—our engineer would show us—we'd just go back and type them back in and everything. And we worked with the engineers a lot, me

and John. Day shift was your main shift, because everything was done on days. Second shift, the engineers were gone home and stuff—you didn't have—they didn't have the quality of, you know, the people working then, up front.

DC: Were there as many people working in the department after you got the CNC machines? Did that eliminate any positions?

AL: There was—no—didn't eliminate them. You know, everybody had two machines, whatever, and stuff. Just made it easier on the operators. Got more production, which we didn't raise production, because they could put out maybe twice as much, but if you got an old dog, he can't learn to go any faster, so the people just slowed down and stuff.

DC: Would they have wanted the parts if you could have produced them?

AL: Oh, the Company wanted them, sure.

DC: Yeah, yeah. All right.

AL: They had the machinery to do it with, and they kept on saying, 'We got the machinery, we're not making no—we're not making more, but you're making better parts.'

DC: So how did that work out? Did they ever study you to try to make you faster?

AL: Yeah.

DC: And what did you do?

AL: Just [?], break them down, slow them down. Slough. I told the operators, said, "Don't break them." If you want a break, let me know, go on a break, and I'll cover for it, you know, cover for them. Because if you break them, I gotta fix them. So it's better to just let them alone, and stuff.

DC: So you had ways to fool the time-study folks?

AL: Oh yeah, I mean, you just take your time—and every couple seconds, you know, a second here, a second there—and you gauge them and everything else, and so the gauge is off, you have to readjust the gauge. You had bubble gauges. You put it in—which is great.

DC: Bubble gauges?

AL: Yeah. You put the part in there, and it bubbles, go your different—well—it had a sensor, touches the part, and the bubble that go up to where the good or bad area was, and then you just had to adjust your cut, make it deeper, heavier, whatever, or lighter.

DC: Were those new machines pretty accurate?

AL: Oh, right on. You could bring them to hundredths of thousandths. I mean they were good, good machines. I don't know about now, because after you start wrecking them they start getting sloppy and stuff.

DC: Oh really, they, they . . .

AL: Well, any wear and tear on anything, and you get more slop in them. When we got them they were nice and tight. I mean, they were good. We went down—when they were buying them, we were—me and John would go down with the engineers to accompany, we had to test them. They had to pass the test to go through before we got them in the shop and stuff. And it was, it was amazing how those machines worked. And I found out too, that in those computers they had wiring going to the front office to check all the cuts. Yeah, the company can wire—and what I knew about those machines was that I got, maybe a tenth what they could do. I mean they were, so much inside of them, the engineers didn't even know all about it.

DC: Really.

AL: They could pick up a lot of stuff. But like, we learned how to trip them off in the back. They had safety areas, and they lock up, you know. We were showing the job setters how to go in the back and get, you know, to gather the parameters and stuff. Because once they lock up, you're going to have a problem, because they got a—there's a stop right there. That's the parameters. It's supposed to stop there. And if you drive that thing through it, it'll stop at that point, but it'll coast a little bit more, and then just froze up. So you had to go in the back and jump them out, move them back off, and . . .

DC: How tough was it to do all that?

AL: Not bad. As long as you—if you knew what you were doing. You have to go in and just hit a switch in the back and stuff like that, which operators weren't allowed to go in the back—that was all job setters and stuff, changing them over.

DC: Oh, OK. So that was your job then.

AL: Uh huh.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

AL: But me and John had the best benefit of learning, because we worked with the engineers. And we had any problems, we went up right to the office in the front and told them, and they'd come right out on the floor, or tell us they'd be right out, or tell us what to do to get them out, what to do.

DC: So would the skilled tradesmen be upset that you'd bypass them?

AL: No [chuckling]. That's less work for them to do.

DC: There we go, OK.

AL: The skilled tradesmen we worked with, and everything else, were the best guys you could find too. I mean they'd never give you no problems—well, the ones that we worked with never gived us no problems.

DC: So the skilled trades and the production workers got along OK?

AL: Skilled trades and job setters got along good.

DC: And job setters, yeah. What about . . .

AL: Workers didn't have nothing to do with skilled trades.

DC: OK. They just didn't interact? Or whatever.

AL: No, cause all they did was run the machines. We were in control of—the job setters were in control of the machines. And so we had a problem, we would put it in the book—you had a book, you'd write it down, and they'd check it—[?] come out, or go right to them. If they ain't busy, they come right out on the floor, and let their foremans know they're not goofing off; they're over here working with us, and stuff—just to cover everybody's back, and nobody'd get in trouble that way.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

AL: Or tell them that if they want to go goof off somewhere instead of over here with us working, and they come over and just sit and bullshit. But they kept our machines going.

DC: So how do you feel—do you feel like you got the production out that you needed to?

AL: [pause] Got the production out that we wanted.

DC: OK.

AL: Yeah. Not what the Company—well the Company always wants more. And the Union, they backed us up and stuff. Which the machines could put out more, but I used to work on the lines, and I didn't work my people any harder than I wanted to work. As long as they did their job, got what they want, a lot of times they got done maybe an hour early. I said, "you're getting done too early. They're going to start seeing that and they're going to start jumping on you." Said, "Slow down during the course of your time, and work right to quitting," and stuff. As long as you kept your machines running, didn't break them down, I was happy, and they were happy.

DC: That's good.

AL: I had a couple that didn't want to work, and they said, "Well, that's too heavy for us." Hey, "Other women worked at the job, and if you don't want to do it, don't tell me, go tell your foreman. Don't bother me." But I had a couple that their work was better than some men did.

DC: Oh yeah. Was that throughout, or just the last couple of years there?

AL: Well, the new machines—we started getting—we started hiring—well the Company, I guess, bought out—well it didn't buy out—they knew our group got hired in '64; they're at the thirty-year point, we'd be leaving. We had to train other people to do the jobs. So they were hiring a lot of people when I was getting out, to take operators' places and stuff.

DC: So a lot of people do thirty years and out, basically?

AL: Yeah. Well, you had a—we went over—like I went over thirty-three years. My brother-in-law went until almost thirty-seven years. We had some guys that just couldn't get out at thirty years. They had, you know, big families, young families, and debts. They stayed in. But the best thing the Union ever got us was the thirty-and-out. Because we got a good pension—sit back and take it easy. But the Union, Union didn't, you know, it did good for us, but they were a bunch of crooks too. [laughs a bit wickedly]

DC: Yeah? How so?

AL: Well your stewards. Your committeemen. You got—a steward's supposed to have two departments—so many men for one steward. And they were overlapping. You got your—your day guy would stay, come in early; the night guy would stay over—I mean, they were working shifts and a half. And same thing with a committeeman, he might have, like on a Sunday, he might have ten, fifteen people, and you have two stewards in there, for ten, fifteen people, and they're supposed to cover a couple hundred. They were making a steward—committeemen were making a hundred fifty thousand dollars a year.

DC: Really?

AL: Yeah, took overtime. And the thing is, a lot of times they weren't even in the shop. They'd be—a lot of times, we had a problem, we'd need our day shift steward early, and we'd try to find him, we'd find out that he's at home sleeping. But he was punched in in the computer that he was there.

DC: Great work if you can get it, huh?

AL: Yeah. That's why everybody wanted to become a steward or a committeeman. But, on the other hand, during contract time, they give us, they got us a lot of benefits and stuff, that we didn't lose and stuff, like cost-of-living, and both our—profit-sharing. That was the biggest thing they came up with—profit-sharing. That's how I paid off my motor

home and stuff. Got all my [?], paid everything, because I was getting paid—at that time, I was getting five thousand dollars a year interest on it. I said, "That's ridiculous." So I paid it off right off the bat. That's all my extra money came in. But, you had to be in the Union, and at one time there—when we first started hiring, got a—when we first got hired in, they had a strike going on, and you had to give—your steward would come around and collect five dollars—because the company wouldn't take it out of your paycheck.

DC: Right.

AL: You had to give them five dollars.

DC: Would you do this . . .

AL: Pardon?

DC: Would you do this while you were on strike?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK. Yeah.

AL: And a lot of people just—they didn't want to give the money and stuff. Money was tight. I mean, that was back in the '64, or it would be '67, around that time when the contracts came up. And five dollars was a lot of money at that time, because I remember my first paychecks, I didn't even make a hundred dollars a week. I was bringing maybe ninety-nine dollars and stuff.

DC: Five bucks is a big chunk of that.

AL: Yeah, yeah.

DC: So you said you were on strike shortly after you . . .

AL: For instance, I only remember one time being on strike. That was at the very beginning. It always seemed like Ford's got it. And we were always happy. Let Ford's have the strikes. And you know, we kept working, and then we supported the strike and stuff like that, but we were still working.

DC: How long were you on strike that one time? Was that that '67 strike you were talking about?

AL: Oh that, yeah, we were on strike maybe about a week. And one other time, we were closer to being the hit target for the contract. And we went to the Union hall, and they told us, "Go home. We'll let you—we'll notify you when the strike's over." I got home, and the next day I found out they're all back to work already. I said, "Oh man." I wasn't

even home one day. It was all over with. You know, the company was talking with the Union to settle everything, so we went back to work and everything. But we got laid off when times were slow and stuff. That's when, you know, we were worried about, you know, when Chrysler's going, going down and stuff. Another time, cars were built up—they laid us off, and stuff.

DC: Did you ever look for another job during those times?

AL: No. That's because—you know they're laying off, or not laying off, they're laying off but—because the times were slow. Well you know you're going to go back to work eventually. I never was worried about a job when I was working for Chrysler's.

DC: Did you ever get any SUB pay?

AL: Oh yeah, yeah. We got that for a couple times, laid off. Hardest part is going on that unemployment—stand in line. It ain't like it is now, that they go one time and they mail all the checks to you.

DC: Oh, you had to go every time?

AL: Every, every two weeks you had to go stand in that line. And there were so many people laid off at the time, you didn't even know where the end of the line is to start, to get into the line.

DC: Yeah. Oh boy.

AL: But I never regretted working for Chrysler's. I don't regret anything I did in my whole life, to tell you the truth. I think I did—when I was younger, we did a lot of stuff and never got in trouble. Raised—I went to the service—did a lot of things and got through it. Raised my family and kept on moving.

DC: Why did you choose Las Vegas? We're getting up to the . . .

AL: Well, my buddy Dave was out there and everything, and I just got tired of, you know, fifty-some years of cold weather and everything, so I thought I'd go out there. So we went out there, and now we wish we were back here, because all the kids and family are back here. And but—it's nice out there. Just the hassle with the insurance company about medical, and doctors. We have a doctor—you go to his doctor today, make an appointment for next week. You go back, and the office is closed. I mean they just move out.

DC: Gone?

AL: Yeah.

DC: Oh.

AL: Gone back to California, or gone! I heard that case a lot of times.

DC: Really. Sounds like a boom and bust mining town or something.

AL: Oh, there's a lot of trouble out there. You know, Vegas has had a lot of crime and stuff out there, which every place does. But in [?] I'm going to come back here with my kids. So we're looking for a place back here now.

DC: Are you? OK.

AL: Grandkids like it out there. They like it, the mountains. The youngest one loves the mountains, and go for walks. And they can go swimming too.

DC: Well, you used to go out to the Plymouth farm and play in the woods . . .

AL: Oh yeah, that was our fun.

DC: Yeah.

AL: Oh, Grandpa had, just behind him, we would [?] Schoolcraft, all the way over to the railroad tracks. That was the boundary lines of his property, in the back.

DC: Were you allowed to go across the tracks?

AL: No, they had a fence up. Well, just a—you could have, but we never went across the tracks. In the woods, that was—oh, that was, maybe a half a mile to the railroad tracks. That was a ways back. And well, my grandmother—we used to call her Grandma on the farm—she treated all of us kids equal and stuff. We had a great time out there. We ran, did things we couldn't do in the city.

DC: Survived without Playstation 2.

AL: [laughs] And television. We didn't have too much. I remember television—my Dad was the first one on the block to have television.

DC: Yeah?

AL: Well, my Dad had to be the first on everything. First one to [?] his car, first one to—first television, whatever came up. He was a good guy and everything else, but he just drank too much. That was his downfall. Treated us kids pretty good.

DC: Did you watch much TV?

AL: Not too much. I let the kids do it—not like my grandsons do. Because you know we had a—back then you had a ten-inch screen, or something that wasn't very big. At eleven

o'clock you had that—it went off. There was nothing on after eleven. And that time I was so young, we just ran the streets and stuff. I didn't—we never had a set for supper or nothing. We never had a sit-down supper, the whole family. You'd just grab something to eat, and hit the, hit the streets again.

DC: A little buffet, huh?

AL: Well you know, my mother, she never complained about it or nothing.

DC: It sounds like she, well let's see, she was always home, but you know, the family meal wasn't part of the routine.

AL: No. But my Dad did some of the cooking and stuff. He'd just have a big pot of chili on, and grab what you want and go. Have a sandwich. Well after I was, what, seventeen, I was gone for three years. I thought I'd hit the streets.

DC: Well I appreciate you spending time with me.

AL: That's no problem

DC: It was excellent. I really . . .

AL: I hope I didn't talk too much! [laughs]

DC: Well, you can't talk too much. The only problem is if I talk too much.

End of Interview