Emerald Neal Interview
Local 849 Union Hall
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DC: I appreciate that a lot. Yeah, OK, but you know some of my questions are really basic, such as when were you born and where were you born and all that?

EN: OK.

DC: So where were you born?

EN: West Virginia

DC: West Virginia, OK. And when was that?

EN: 1935, January 26th, 1935

DC: All right. How about your parents?

EN: Well uh, yeah . . .

DC: Were they from West Virginia too?

EN: Yeah, in West Virginia

DC: And what town?

EN: Hinton [southern West Virginia, near Beckley]

DC: OK, where's that?

EN: Uh, it's over the hill in the holler . . .

DC: Yeah? OK.

EN: . . . in West Virginia. It's a small town. I was really raised in the country, though. My aunt raised me. She's ninety-one years of age.

DC: She's still alive?

EN: Mm hmm.

DC: Oh really.

EN: I go home every year in the fall to see her. Haven't been there yet, but I'll be going in November to see her.

DC: And how is she doing?

EN: Well, she's still independent. She can't drive anymore, but, she does drive to church every Sunday and you know in West Virginia you only have one road—one lane really. So everybody who knows her gets out of the way and she makes it to church and back.

DC: So how old were you when you went to live with her?

EN: Oh, I'd say about five years of age. Yeah, she raised me.

DC: Did you see your parents after that?

EN: They were around, they were divorced. And, my Father, no. I haven't really seen him. And, but Mom worked and Aunt Eva didn't. She was a homemaker in the country. But my Mom lived in the town you see.

DC: Eva's your aunt?

EN: Mm hmm, her sister you see—my mother's sister. So yeah, raised up as a country boy.

DC: All right. When did you come to—when did you move north?

EN: Actually, well, you need a personal history I guess here.

DC: Yeah.

EN: I met this fine lady on a blind date, my junior year of high school. Her name is Cara Neal—and uh, well Cara Bent then. So uh, the blind date we met and like I lived twenty-two miles away from Hinton. You see, I lived in the country. And we would come to town every weekend to do our shopping, you see. But my cousin lived in town where Cara lived. And she invited me to a birthday party and I refused about three times and uh, I uh, that was it. Maxine was my cousin—she was getting ready to leave and Aunt Eva walked in the door and Maxine said I wish you'd come Neal, and Aunt Eva says, "come where?" Well I wanted him come to my birthday party and he says he has to go back home, do his chores and couldn't do it. Aunt Eva says, “Aw, you stay, I'll come back and pick you up tomorrow.” I said, “Naw, I want to go home.” Well she said, “Aw, it might do you good.” So she kind of talked me into it. I said, “OK, fine.” So I met Cara, and sparks flew from there. We contacted each other through the

week by letters. We'd write each other a letter. And then in my senior year we was still—you know, Cara had graduated the year before me. So we really fell deeply in love and we eloped and got married. Nobody knew it. We didn't live with each other. She said I want you to finish high school, and I said I want to too. So I went all the way through high school and graduated and told everybody at the end of graduation that I had gotten married to Cara. And she liked my class much smaller because we only had twenty-one in our class you see, a small school.

DC: Did most of the children around there go on through high school?

EN: Mm hmm, yeah. We all graduated, yeah. And Cara graduated, like I said, the year before I did. And her class in town was a hundred and thirty-eight people, you see. They all had twenty-one in mine—very small country school. So, then I graduated and my sister worked in Detroit Excello Corporation in Highland Park. Called and told me to come up, they had a job, and I did. And I came up here in 1953.

DC: OK.

EN: And got laid off and went back to West Virginia again. And then they had moved out to Willow Run here, my sister and her husband. They said, "GM's hiring, Neal. Come up, we'll get you a job". Came up here and been here ever since. Worked at General Motors for a year, and then I wanted to work at Ford's so I kept coming over here for a year at Ford's—and no! Nothing! And I'd keep coming and bug them every month or so, once a month. And then finally about a year later I came down again and Mr. Keller, who worked there in the personnel department, he said, "Well I can't find your application. Maybe you ought to fill another one out." I said, "I had one in." "We can't find it." So I filled another one out, and at the very bottom I penciled in—I worked for public schools over here for one summer—just another job you know. And he was shaking his head no and I said, "Aw, here we go again." He got down to the bottom—I wasn't even going to put this on there—and he said, "What did you do? Worked for public schools?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Come on in here. I did too one time." Well that got me a job at Ford Motor Company, and about thirty-five years with Ford's, before retiring. But I retired because of my wife. She had a brain aneurism, and I almost lost her to that, but we got her back, I'd say 95 percent. And then three years ago she got ovarian cancer and she died in January of this year.

DC: I'm sorry.

EN: And now I'm back in my union. Volunteering and doing all kinds of work, whatever.

DC: Yeah.

EN: It's a great organization to belong to, the union.

DC: You've given me quite an overview here, and you've even . . .

EN: I hope I've not gone too long

DC: Oh no, not at all, no, no. I just have to figure out where to begin. You've given me lots of things to think about here. When did your sister move up? You said that she was already up in Detroit?

EN: Mm hmm, she just came up here I would say probably in 1950—around 1950, I'd say.

DC: OK. And was she significantly older than you?

EN: Mm hm. She was five years older than me.

DC: OK. And she lived with your aunt as well? or uh …

EN: Yea, my aunt raised her up too.

DC: OK.

EN: And then when she went to high school she kind of went to town, with her Mom, got married—married a fellow. This is now before I came to Detroit, you see, so you're probably going back to 1950 for Willa, Willa's her name, W-i-l-l-a.

DC: All right.

EN: Yes, and that was it. But she—they're divorced now, and she's been married two times since her first husband. He died of cancer. Two of her husbands died of cancer. So, and then the third, they just separated, but she has a daughter by her third—the only child.

DC: So, uh she and her first husband then moved to Detroit?

EN: Mm hmm.

DC: From West Virginia?

EN: Right, from West Virgina, yeah.

DC: So that would have been about '50, 1950 you said?

EN: Yeah, I'd say 1950.

DC: OK. Did you have other brothers and sisters too?

EN: Uh, no, just one brother passed away between me and Willa, pneumonia.

DC: Oh, how old was he, when he died?

EN: O,h I think like six years, I believe. Might be off a bit there, Dan, I think somewhere in there.

DC: He was young, very young.

EN: Yeah, very young. Yeah. Maybe younger, you know. I could—I don't know how far you want me to go back and tell you my first job I ever had.

DC: I would like to hear about that.

EN: Oh boy. This is a joke.

DC: That was actually one of my questions, right here.

EN: Is it? Oh my goodness. OK. I have to back up before we came to Michigan. I did graduate from high school. I wanted to stay in West—well, boy I tell you, I'm chopping it up here.

DC: That's OK.

EN: Her father—my wife's father worked on the railroad, OK? He told me—that's when the diesels were coming in, taking the locomotives out, you see, at that time. He told me, maybe if I would take a course or something to be a diesel mechanic, that maybe the roundhouse would be moving there in Hinton as a central location to repair all the diesels. OK. And so I did, I took an ICS [International Correspondence School] course. And I'm doing great with it, OK? And I got about halfway through and they decided they weren't going to do it. Well you see, I still needed a job, but then, in the meantime I was working odd jobs, saying OK, until I got something better. And I was still doing this correspondence course too. They built a chicken factory in one of the towns there in West Virginia, newly opened, everything. Went out and applied for it—no problem, got the job. OK, so you know, not ever having a first job, how do you dress? So I went to work that day in slacks, and nice shirt, shiny shoes. I remember walking in, the guy looked at me kind of funny, says, "Well, we do have a rubber apron, and we got some rubber boots." "Huh? OK." So I went that day, they put me at a machine here with two big rubber wheels with kind of knobbies on them, you know? OK, so they back this truck of chickens up to the door and all these chicken crates, they're cackling, they're hollering and carrying

on. So they didn't cut their heads off. They stuck them some way and hung them up on a rack. And the first thing they did was come through a machine like mine—it was a lot larger, with big rubber drums with the knobs on them, just beating the heck out of those chickens. Knocking the feathers off—my first operation—I was the first after that—you take the chicken, hold it and get all the pin feathers off, and they was still kicking and everything. My wife picked me up—I'm going to tell it the way it is—my wife picked me up at lunch time. I'm going to tell you I had feathers, shit, and blood all over me, in my hair—I never even went back. I went home and took a shower and said, "That's it! That's it!" So very shortly after that she, Willa, called me and said come up to Detroit, that they were hiring. So that's when I went to Excello Corporation in Highland Park.

DC: You were ready to get away from the chicken factory?

EN: Oh yes! Yes!

DC: How long did that chicken factory last down there?

EN: I don't know. I don't know but that it's even there yet today or not. It's in Rocksford (sp?) West Virginia. But when I did come to Detroit in '53 and got hired at Excello—that's during the Korean War—everybody—the war was over with so they all come back and assumed their job. That's the way it is in the factory, you know. So that's when I went back to West Virginia.

DC: So you were laid off because of the returning veterans?

EN: Right, from the Korean War.

DC: OK. I see. What exactly did you do at Excello when you were there?

EN: Well, I'll tell you the truth. I was a louse. Now I want to add this in to there, because I think everybody should know this. A country boy coming into the city is very difficult because you're not used to this hemmed in period of cement, nothing to do. I was very poor—I'd maybe take off from work two or three times a week or whatever, go back to West Virginia.

DC: During the week?

EN: Well, within a month, let's say, within a month. OK. And maybe not even go to work during the week. I just didn't care, you know. And yet I had that responsibility, which I wasn't realizing, of a family.

DC: You were married?

EN: Yeah, married and a baby.

DC: You had a baby? When was the baby born?

EN: Oh, Grace Hospital, which isn't there now, in Detroit, in September of '54. And, uh, uh lost my train of thought there . . .

DC: I'm sorry.

EN: No, no, you didn't . . .

DC: You were talking about missing work and . . .

EN: Yea, just a louse. Just didn't know what responsibility was, I guess. So I did this for maybe a good while, and finally the foreman straightened me out one night. Alex Gillespie—I'll never forget his name. I come in and he said, "Neal, where have you been?" And I gave him some lie: 'I'm down in West Virginia helping my father out on the farm' and all—now we didn't have that big of a farm—'putting hay up,' whatever. He just looked right through me, and says, "You know what? I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to help you out one time. If you miss for any reason, here on out, anytime, you're fired." Well that kind of soaked into me, I guess. Somebody had to tell me. From that day on to this day, I respect responsibility. That talk with the foreman helped me out.

DC: Why do you suppose you were able to keep your job before then? Were they short of workers?

EN: Not really. No, I don't know why he did. A good Samaritan I guess. I would have to say he was, a good Samaritan, because he—as I recall, he was good on the job. And in fact he gave me—I was like—we did piece work. Now truthfully, you could come in, you filled your own time sheet out and everything at Excello's, and give the foreman a copy. He had leaders. All the foreman did was set at the desk, smoke a cigar, whatever. And the leaders was just, like someone like myself had been a leader, make sure everybody had something to do. And the job they did paid off for that eight hours, you see, that you put in. We could get done in eight hours, leave, go home, but I mean we could get done in four hours. It was very simple, to get this production out they wanted. That's all they wanted, a certain amount, and that was it.

DC: What did Excello make?

EN: Aircraft parts—and they was very particular with them. When I got back, or when he give me the talk to me, he say's now I'm going to give you a good job. And he did. It was a—you had to buff these parts that had to be just precise because they're aircraft parts, you see. I guess he liked the work, and he come over about a month later and says, "Neal would you like a better job?" I said,

"Sure," you know. "Well you done pretty good. I think you're straightening out a little bit." "Well, OK." So he had—amongst this department, they hired a lot of women workers, you see, and they were inspectors. So I went to this department and I had to work, it was on a machine with a little rag wheel, a buffing wheel so forth—they thought it was too dangerous for a woman to do. So here I was, this whole department, nothing but women at their stations doing their parts, all I do was go around every so often—they had little trays on their desks—rust needed to be knocked off this part, blah, blah, blah. And had a woman supervisor. Yeah, it was nice, better job. Then the Korean War ended and that stopped, you see, so that's why I got laid off.

DC: Did most of these women get hired during the Korean War or had they been working since World War II? Do you know?

EN: I would say probably a lot of them been there a long time, you know. I just really didn't get that deeply into it.

DC: Sure.

EN: I would say, yeah, they'd probably been there awhile. I'm sure they hired a lot of—few people there, like myself, but then I think most of them had been there a while. Maybe a lot of them had been, you know. Hard to tell.

DC: At this point, sure. I understand. Anyways, was Excello organized at that point in time? Did you have a union at Excello?

EN: Truthfully, I don't know.

DC: You don't?

EN: Truthfully, I don't know. They probably were, but I wasn't involved, I wasn't thinking union, you know. Probably, if they had it, I just don't know. Because if they were my problems, they probably would have talked to me, you know? Nobody ever mentioned, 'do you want to see a union person,' or anything, you know. So I really don't know. And, uh. Yes! Yes, I do too. Because I got my union withdrawal slip. I found it here, going through some papers. Yes, I got that, yes. So it had to be.

DC: When you left your job? When you got laid off?

EN: Yeah. See, when you leave your job and you go to another plant, you can get a withdrawal slip and you won't have to pay that initiation fee again, you see. So yes, I did get it, see. They were unionized. But I never talked to a union person the whole time I was there.

DC: So you were in a union but hardly even knew it.

EN: Right. Right. Didn't even know what it was!

DC: It didn't register on your radar screen.

EN: Right.

DC: So, I take it to mean, then, during that time, if you had any difficulties or any questions about your job, you didn't talk to any union rep.

EN: No! Because I didn't even know the union existed. No one told me, you see. It's quite different today, because we have orientation today, for the union to talk to the new people coming in, as well as management has their orientation too, you see.

DC: Where did you live when you first moved to Detroit?

EN: Oh my, oh my—a one-room apartment. I worked midnights. Just slept in the middle of the floor all day while Cara did her work all around me. The bed pulled out of the wall. Oh yeah (laughing), it was very hard.

DC: How far was that from Excello factory?

EN: I lived between 12th and 14th then. You go down—one way down, one way back. I think 12th went down, the other one came back. And maybe, I don't know, maybe a thirty-minute drive.

DC: Oh really. OK. So you had a car?

EN: Yes, yeah. '51 Chevy. We came to Michigan in a '41 Chevy. And then, uh, quite a few accidents. That happened when I was working over at General Motors. We traded in the '41 for a '51, and that was a touchy situation too. I wasn't in any working trouble at General Motors, but General Motors was much harder to work for than Ford's.

DC: This is the second job you had?

EN: The second job, when I came back, yes. We had to go home to take care of some family business—Cara's aunt passed away. I had sent them a Western Union telegram that I couldn't get back.

DC: Was this Excello? No, you got laid off from there.

EN: Yes. We're talking about GM now.

DC: GM now. Gotcha.

EN: And I sent them a telegram—up front, good worker, no problems there, as far as that goes. Other than that—more later on that. So I took the week, and when we were going to West Virginia—I don't know why it took me extra—it might have been more than a week, I'm thinking back. Uh, we was coming in the Chevy—we was coming around a curve, this was going home, to take care of the problem. And I came across this fellow behind me, you know, talking to his friend, and speeding up real fast behind me, and I got kind of nervous: "I don't know. I wonder what he's doing back there." Well, I come around a curve, and here was a state truck, backing right out of a driveway right in front of me. Well, I stopped, as far as me from you maybe. Here comes this—it was a young kid—here he come around that curve, man, didn't even see it. Wham! Puts us right into the truck. The rear lights flew out all over my baby, Cara—we named our baby, our first child after my wife's name—glass all over her. Oh my goodness! And we couldn't get out of the car. The doors were jammed. I was worried about the baby. Got out, got the baby out, and then the police came—they're like, you know, "Hey, get a broom and sweep this glass up!" Us! I said, "I'm worried here about . . . " "Well, let's get the glass cleaned up before somebody else gets hurt." I said, "Well this is weird." But we did it. And it went on all week—I had problems with this, and the other problem—because the boy didn't have insurance.

DC: Where did this take place?

EN: West Virginia. When we went back to take care of her aunt.

DC: I knew you were on your way back. I wasn't sure how far you were, though.

EN: I was going down when this happened, see? I left GM to go down and take care of these problems.

DC: Right, yeah, but you were through Ohio and everything. You were in West Virginia.

EN: Right. And it took a long battle. I had to get a lawyer because they just said, "Well he don't have insurance, and nothing we can do." My car was totaled out. They had to re-do it all—new fenders, new front—it all works, OK. "Well, you'll have to pay for it, Mr. Neal." I said, "No, no, no, no, no." I asked the policeman, and he says, "You'll have to work this out. There's nothing we can do." "You gave him a ticket, didn't you?" "We'll take care of that." They never gave him a ticket. And another thing, we take care of people here [meaning West Virginia]. We had Michigan license plates on—I don't know. See what I'm saying? You're going back here now. I said, "Wait a minute, we're from here also. I just work in Michigan too." That didn't do. We finally

got it done. We finally worked it out. In fact, it straightened the boy out. We got a letter later from the parents—he got a job and paid for this, you see. Set it up. They thanked us for really getting him motivated, to get a job and pay for this, see? So that worked out. We all ran back, you know, took care of the other part, and hurried back to Michigan. I was going through the GM parking lot, here came a guy with a big Buick—wham! "Oh, I don't believe this!" I was working midnights, you know. I walked in to tell the foreman, I says, "Look . . . " "Where've you been?" I said, "Look, I got to take care of something out in the parking lot right now. I'm here." "Well you may be here . . . " "Look, I'll see you in a minute. I had an accident in the parking lot. I got to go." I went back, got this all taken care of—the guy says, "Hey, I'll take care of it. It's my fault." And he comes to a sideway—that's where he hit me, you see. He messed the whole car up again, you know! You know, that was it.

DC: Is that when you gave up on that car?

EN: I'll tell you—on that one. So I did that, went back into the plant, and he says, "You know I should fire you Neal." I said, "Fire me for what?" "I don't know where you've been." "Come on, I sent you a telegram." "What telegram?" "Wait a minute now. Just hold everything." So I don't have a copy of the telegram, you see, but I went down here—and it got to the point he wanted me to prove that I sent a telegram. "Well maybe you didn't. I don't know." He said, "You didn't get a copy of the telegram?" "I don't have nothing." "Now he could have been lying. I don't know." But anyway, I went down to the telegraph office—Western Union office—and they had a copy. I said, "Here you are." "Get to work!" "OK." And that was the end of *that*, you see, ordeal.

DC: So it sounds like you got the job at GM before you went down to take care of the business in West Virginia.

DN: Uh huh. Yes. Right.

DC: And how did you get the job at GM?

EN: My sister and them moved. I believe the GM plant back then had burned down in Detroit [probably the 1953 Hydra-Matic fire in Livonia], where they were working. Now Willa was working at Excello Corporation, but her husband was working at GM, you see. So I guess Willa quit Excello's when they moved to Willow Run plant here, the GM plant. That one burned down in Detroit, or something happened. So they moved out here to Willow Run from Detroit.

DC: So did you hire in at that plant that burned down?

EN: No.

DC: No. You hired in out here at Willow Run.

EN: At Willow Run here, yes. See I was back in West Virginia from being laid off at Excello Corporation, see? OK? Then they called me and told me they're hiring at Willow Run, so I come back here.

DC: I'm following you now.

EN: And that's when I had to go home. I was working . . .

DC: You got the job at GM and then had to go right back . . .

EN: To take care of Cara's aunt that passed away, and everything that happened there.

DC: So they didn't know you very well.

EN: Right. They didn't know me too well. Probably a new hire then—and we're in that again, you know. So all of that—problems—how can you help it? You know, problems happen.

DC: And you had your little baby, so we're talking about the end of 1954, or early 1955 now?

EN: Yeah, yes. Right. In that area, because, yeah. Because I hired in at Ford's in 1956, you see. August '56.

DC: Tell me a little more about GM. What kind of work you did there, and all, and then we'll move on to Ford.

EN: Well, I operated a broach there. They made transmissions—in other words, it was a transmission plant. It was a huge job. I mean, this machine has three broaches—they call them broaches. They're long things with teeth on them that, when you put a round piece in there, like a drum, they call it, it pulls up through these things, and it cuts internal teeth in this drum for the transmission, see?

DC: All right.

EN: So that was good. No problems, you know. And I was still in the ICS course, taking it. OK? Doing it all. So, I remember one day, the President of Local 735—that's right on Michigan Ave., back then—come pay me a visit on the broach, and asked me if I'd like to get involved in the union. And here we go again. What's that? You know I hadn't had much business with the union yet, you know. And yeah, this is Local 735, and I was just getting ready to maybe get involved with the Union at General Motors. I don't know. It was a possibility, you see.

DC: Had you ever come across a union in West Virginia?

EN: Yes. Yes.

DC: What was your experience with any unions in West Virginia?

EN: OK. See, I'm backing up again on you.

DC: I know. I [?] you this time.

EN: No, no. Well, when I got laid off at Excello Corporation, I did pick up—there was a factory, a machine shop, a branch off the main one, moved to West Virginia, in our hometown, Hinton. 'Oh, this is going to be a good opportunity—get a god job now.' And it was, compared to then. They hired me. Well, a little pull on that one too, because there was an aunt in that town there that knew someone, said I needed a job. So I got a job. So they made war things too. I can't—it was some kind of chambers they made. Explosive chambers. We made the chamber part. I don't know what it did. They didn't tell us that. It was a machine shop, though. Everything was milled, the machinery and so forth, lathes and stuff, you see. But they hired me as a core maker. That's where you take sand, and you put this mixture with it, and you make these cores, and put them in the ovens and bake them—of what you wanted to do.

DC: Inside the mold?

EN: Yeah. And then we made other things too. You make a mold out of sand, but you've got to have the part to lay in the sand to make the indentation, and then you put the two sides together, and then you melt the aluminum, or the brass, you pour in this, and it makes that part.

DC: Was that hard to learn how to do?

EN: No. I worked with a guy, and it was very good. You know, I didn't mind it. It was a job, and then all of a sudden they decided that they wanted to form a union, see? And of course, I mean, you know, I went along with everybody, and we met at the Commerce Building there. And then Mr. Davis, that run the plant now, the managing side, I guess he heard we was trying to form a union, and he come out, and says, "Now I'm going to say this. I don't really have anything against the union, but right now we're getting started, and we don't have enough contracts to pay the wages you want to be paid." I was making a dollar an hour, and the person there was making $2 an hour. So I was comfortable, you know, at this point. But truthfully, I guess so, you can't have a business if you don't have enough business to operate the business. So everybody was talking about all of this, and I said, "Maybe we should wait until he does get more business." More contracts, in other words. Then we could have a bigger—you know. But

they were set about their ways. He said, "Well, I tell you, if you vote for the union, they'll shut the doors tomorrow." Sure enough, they voted for the union, they shut the doors the next day, and that was the end of that job. Personally, knowing what I know today, yeah, I think we should have waited until we got off the ground a little more. Then we'd have more meat to work with, you know? If we had more contracts. But as I recall, we had like one contract, you know, making these drums, that was it. That was the only thing I had seen in there.

DC: So did that affect your perception of unions at all?

EN: No. No. It really didn't. I more or less never even gave it any thought. I said, "Well, that job's over with."

DC: It sounds like you weren't completely committed to that job anyway.

EN: No. I could have been, though. Because I remember Mr. Davis—now he was like the manager, the president of it—would come around and talk to us. He personally—well, I'm not going to say he personally came to me. Yeah, he *did* personally come to me—he said, "Maybe you should start learning more about machinery and gauges and stuff." He gave me the book. I think I have his book at home somewhere. I don't know. He gave me, yeah. It was sort of like being a skilled tradesman, you know. You're learning all this different machinery. You have to use gauges and set-ups and so forth, you see, which maybe would have worked out. But then, you know, as I got involved, I probably would have got started with the union, sure, negotiations and so forth, so you know. [laughs]

DC: Did you want to stay in West Virginia if you could?

EN: Yeah. [Somewhat haltingly.] Because Cara was a dancing teacher when I met her. And she worked for a lady that had the studio, but Cara was second in command. And I always asked her, did she—you know, did I really pull her away from what she really wanted to do. She said, "No." She said, "I'd do it all over again." She'd do what she did today. So I felt good about that. But yeah, it would have been nice if we had stayed. But things just change so fast. When the diesels came in, it cut the town—everybody lost their jobs. They lost their homes, and everything. They moved, yeah. It just cut the town right in half. It destroyed the town, in other words.

DC: Just because of the diesels?

EN: Yeah. Because everybody depended on the locomotives. They all worked on the railroad. So diesels just cut everything right in half. It destroyed—they didn't need the maintenance, the locomotives.

DC: So maintenance was a big thing in your town?

EN: Yeah. Railroads was the thing there, you know.

DC: Did diesel have a greater range, or something?

EN: Yeah. Yeah. It was just less maintenance. To keep a steam engine up, there's a lot of maintenance to it, you know, oiling and this and that, and that and that. But that's what . . .

DC: Well, I've got you jumping all over now. [Phone rings, tape is cut off for a few minutes, banter about the dials on the recorder] So anyways, I was thinking, did Cara ever get back into dancing?

EN: Yeah. Yeah, because—when I—you know, we had layoffs here at Ford's, and without losing anything or whatever, we picked up odd jobs, where—she went to work for Arthur Murray's here in Ann Arbor. And made a few bucks, so, you know, put it all together, so we could pay for the things we wanted, and what we had, without losing anything.

DC: Did she do that off and on? Can you remember when she started to do that?

EN: When she started to work at Arthur Murray's?

DC: Right.

EN: It was probably in '58, in that area, yeah. We had a layoff a year at Ford's here, you see.

DC: We'll talk more about that soon. That was a big recession year, I know.

EN: Right. Yeah. But she did that, until we got back on our feet, and then, she just, that was it. But most of her time, working, for Cara, she got a job at Moray's [sp?] Jewelers, here in Ypsilanti. They're not in business now, but she worked there seventeen years with them.

DC: Was she working—you had at least one child. Did you have . . .

EN: We had three.

DC: Three, OK.

EN: And when we went back to West Virginia, one was born there. Because, it was in the making, and then when we got laid off and went back to West Virginia, she was born in Bluefield, West Virginia.

DC: Bluefield. I've been there.

EN: All right! They have Bluefield, Virginia *and* West Virginia. They come together, you see.

DC: It's on the Turnpike now.

EN: Yes. Right.

DC: So did Cara work when the children were young?

EN: Uh, yeah. Yeah. We had our babysitters. Yeah, we did. And we lived here in Ypsilanti for twelve years. Then we just kept liking wide open spaces, you know. And she got into antiques, later down the road. In fact, I have that at home now. That's what I'm doing in retirement, see. But she did that, but when she worked at Moray's, the factory wouldn't hire a husband and wife, you see, for years. And that changed in the '70s, and the first part of the '80s. So I wanted Cara to have a job at Ford's here, so I kept, you know, bugging over there. I won't mention names—I don't want to get anybody in trouble over there. It ain't nothing. I just says, "Look, you have a wife and child." "Well Neal, if I knew [gist of it is that Ford supervisor was reluctant to hire Kara because he knew Mr. Moray and didn't want to take employees away from him] that Mr. Moray, because I do a lot of business with him. I don't want to pull his help away." Oh, whoa now. Wait a minute! "You can make twice as much here. The benefits are better." "I don't know, Neal." I said, "Well hey, how about you working on that a little bit? I won't pressure you to." "How about if you talk to Mr. Moray?" And he did. Mr. Moray said, "No, I don't have any objections to that." So he hired Cara. She worked, and I got a real nice poem that she wrote when she got laid off.

DC: When did she get laid off?

EN: 1980, I think it was. She hired in in 1977, or somewhere like that. Cara helped—Cara was very helpful in the union. She helped me do the paper, if not 95 percent of it, because I was doing other things. And she liked very much involvement. And went to Black Lake, at the Walter and May Reuther Center. I asked one day, I says, "You know my wife, I know she's not per se, working in our local. But she's my spouse, and she helps me with all the work in my local, like the paper. Can I bring her?" "Oh, of course." So, yeah—went to classes, learned all of this.

DC: So she became very active.

EN: Oh yeah, very active in the union. Yes, in a lot of things.

DC: I keep backing up and going forward.

EN: I know. It's hard, that's why I say you have to work this out.

DC: Life is like that though, you know.

EN: Things are coming at you.

DC: Yeah. I'm trying not to lose track of all the places we've been. When you were still at GM, last time we focused in on your work.

EN: Yeah. Now, OK. I'm working at GM, OK, and I wanted in at Ford's here.

DC: And why did you want to go to Ford's?

EN: I don't know, to this day. But I'm sure glad I did. Maybe it's because of the way GM was, in a sense. They're a very—you got a job, that's good enough for you. But it was a dividing line. I was still taking the ICS course, OK. But I came over here, and got the job at Ford's. I worked both jobs, GM and Ford's.

DC: Wow.

EN: That was good money back then.

DC: This would have been, what, 1955, '56?

EN: Yeah, in that area. In that area. Yes. So I worked about two months. I was still taking my . . .

DC: At both jobs.

EN: Um hmm.

DC: Remind me again what the ICS course was for.

EN: Diesel mechanics.

DC: Right. OK.

EN: Yes. I was still taking this correspondence at home. Taking my tests, mailing them in. But I had thirty minutes to get from one job to the other. Cara would be standing at the door with a lunch bag, "Bye honey, mmoi [kiss], I'll see you later." I worked GM days, Ford's afternoons. I had thirty minutes to get from there to here.

DC: How far apart were the . . .

EN: OK, Willow Run . . .

DC: OK, Willow Run to here.

EN: Yeah.

DC: OK.

EN: And we lived out here on Jerome Street then. Yes. And it's off Ford Boulevard. OK. Yeah. And then I did that. I was getting very tired . . .

DC: I imagine.

EN: . . . about two months, and I went whoa.

DC: When did you get off your afternoon shift?

EN: What happened, I never—they stayed the same, afternoons and days. So I'm walking into the parking lot at GM—the airplanes, you know, they'd fly over a lot over there. Y'all could reach up and touch them. Didn't faze me at all—didn't even look up, you know. I says, "I got to stop this." But what happened, I was coming up to graduation from the diesel mechanics, and I had to go to Chicago for two weeks, in-shop training, to get my diploma. Now I went to GM, and I told the foreman, I says, "I have to have two weeks off." Now my working was good, OK? And no working relationship—nothing wrong here. And he said, "Oh, Neal, you've got a job. I think you don't have to go. You got a job here." That's the bottom line: No. You've got a job here. Hmmm. Well, I came down to Ford's that evening, and I went in, Mr. Fitzgerald there, I says, "Mr. Fitzgerald, I've got to have two weeks off." "What for?" "Well, I'm finishing my ICS course," and I showed him everything. I did that at GM too. He said, "Well yeah. Well that's no problem. Two weeks off?" I said, "Yeah." "Well you got it. You'll be a benefit to us, probably." "Well I appreciate that. Thank you." Went back to Joe Morris [supervisor at GM], said, "Good bye. That's it. I quit."

DC: Now do you think that the different response was just the different foremen, or do you think that GM just, in general, didn't want . . .

EN: GM was that way. You're just a number to them. I mean more so—I think Ford's, to me—they're a business too, and that's great—but I think they recognize you more as a person than General Motors does. Back then. I don't know about today. I know they just, you know—the plant was so big—it's the bomber plant—we just had little incidents, like, I'll give you one: Everybody has to walk—you have your lockers—I know it's the rules—you got lockers. The lockers go about the length of that plant. Well your job might be a half mile away from the locker. Well, people would cheat a little bit. They'll take their coat, and they'll take it off to their job, and they'll put it down by the machine

somewhere or something, you know. So, hmm, one night they came through. They was on a jacket drive. They must have had a hundred jackets they picked up, mine included. So they went down—we couldn't say nothing because we knew what the rule was: put it in the locker. They just gathered them up. "Where are you taking my jacket?" "It'll be ready for you when you go. We took it by the locker." Boy, come quitting time, they had all these hundred jackets in this locker, they was all mixed up man—everybody scrambling to get their jacket and get out of there. I think mine was a white one. It was totally dirty when I got it. I don't know. It was a little uncomfortable, things like that. But then Ford's had their rules too. It used to be if you didn't have that badge on, you got wrote up, period. Yeah. You had to wear a little, metal badge here at Ford's, you know. But that's when I said good bye—that wasn't the deciding factor, the coat incident—I wanted Ford's. I would have quit sooner or later anyway at GM, and stayed at Ford's. But then the going to Chicago was the deciding factor. Well gee, you ain't recognizing schooling, you know. So hey, that was it.

DC: Was there anything in the union contract at that time to allow you a leave of absence, that you can recall?

EN: You mean at GM?

DC: Yeah.

EN: No, they wouldn't give me nothing. They said "no."

DC: There wasn't anything in the contract that would give you a leave of absence?

EN: Oh, yeah, I don't know. See? Now probably, if I knew about the union in more depth, I'd have said, "Now get me a committee man down here. We'll see about this." See what I'm saying? And I didn't know this.

DC: You were still young.

EN: Yeah, still young, but not thinking anything about unions. Today I'd say, "Well hey, you get me a committee man down here. We'll see." You know, whatever. Right?

DC: I don't know if there was anything in there or not.

EN: I don't either. Undoubtedly there was. The union would probably say, "Wait a minute, you know. This guy—hey, come on!" And they'd raise holy heck about it. Would probably have got me off.

DC: Before we leave the bomber plant for good, did you know any of the people you worked with there? You said it was a huge plant. Thousands of people working there? Did you know anybody?

EN: Not really. Probably did. It's been so long now. Me and one guy, we ate together. I can't recall—pull his name out. Rex, I believe it was. But I can't remember his last name.

DC: Were there a lot of folks like you who had come up from the South, from West Virginia?

EN: Oh yeah, definitely. You know, back in World War II, oh man, I'm going to take you way back. A lot of happenings there. But this is way back.

DC: That's all right. Go ahead.

EN: Even at home. When I was in school.

DC: Did you see people leaving for the North?

EN: Well, that's what this is all about. I learned all this later, as of now. Henry Ford offered everybody $5 a day, you know, and boy, he was pulling people out of everywhere. That was big money back then, you know.

DC: That's really more like World War I.

EN: Yeah, right. So that got a lot of people up here, then families followed it. Like myself, was born up here, at the end of this. Then people coming up, you know, kinfolks, and so forth, like that. I tell you, they came not only from the South, but East, West, North. You know, and Canada, whatever. And of course, they left school, you know, and they didn't get educated—even writing, reading, whatever. And the job was so good, it didn't take reading or writing to do the job, OK? But now, since the '70s and '80s come about, people had to be educated. Because it's all computerized stuff now. The whole world is. So you either have to learn it, or get out. That's about the size of it, you know?

DC: Back in the '50s, did you have more education than most of the people you were working with? You graduated high school.

EN: Yeah, I would say, probably, you know. There were a lot of them there that graduated from high school that was older than me, that was already here you see. But today, I think it's caught up to where most of the people in the plant are high school graduates, if not college. You'd be surprised at the people working in the plant with bachelor's degrees, because, hey, it would take me years to get what I'm getting now, the benefits, the money I'm making. To be a doctor, I'll

be fifty years old by the time I'm a doctor and making all this kind of money, the benefits.

DC: Let's talk about getting to Ford's then. What was your job when you started at Ford? You overlapped for awhile, both GM and Ford. But what were you doing at Ford back then?

EN: I hired in as a final inspector?

DC: As a filing inspector?

EN: A *final* inspector.

DC: OK. Final, OK.

EN: That's where you check the parts before they go out the door. You check a sample out of it. But that was . . .

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

EN: . . . OK, yeah. When I hired in, I remember Keller told Fitz—Keller was the assistant to Fitzgerald. OK? He worked in Personnel. Labor Relations there. And I remember walking in to the [???] down there, he says, "Ah Fitz, give him a job." He says, "I ain't got no job. We don't got any jobs right now." And I say, "I'll do anything. Just give me a job." So, "You ever do inspection?" I said, "Well, I worked this one job putting these drums in this thing." "Well that's inspection! You gauged it, didn't you?" "Yeah." When do you want to start? Want to start today?" "Sure!" So I started afternoons that day. That was a production checker's job, and you work on the line with the people. In other words, you check the parts 100 percent. You're the end of the line, you see. It's the final. So I guess about three years after that, the foreman comes down and says, "Neal, we're going to move this off line and call it final inspection." That's what the floor inspector was doing. And the floor inspector would just go on the floor and walk around, and check every so often. "But you'll be using these gauges here on this table." "Oh OK, great." "Good job!"

DC: This was three years later, you said?

EN: Uh hmm. Very good job, you know. On the production line. All you do is take a sample out of the finished product, and if anything is faulty, you reject the whole thing. Production has to go through it again—all of them. So that's a good job, you see? Yeah, but there would be cutbacks, and I'd go and drive a

Hi-Lo some, and then there was times I went on production work, because of the cutbacks, you see. That's how it works in the plant.

DC: It seems like the inspector job would have been highly desired.

EN: Well, it was. Like I said now, you had to read blueprints, you had to read mikes [measuring gauge], and you had to pass these tests to get it, you see, so education helps.

DC: And that was a union job?

EN: No.

DC: No, it wasn't? OK.

EN: That's still company work. I hadn't gotten involved in the union yet. [This is a misunderstanding. It was a unionized job, but Mr. Neal later worked for the union, and apparently he was responding to the question of who was his employer.]

DC: All right. Well, that's why I asked, because that sounded like a managerial job. Inspection.

EN: Yeah. It's all what you call off-line work. You got to read blueprints, mikes, and certain gauges, OK? And then I worked several jobs under inspection. I was a floor inspector for awhile. Then I went into receiving inspector. So I'm sitting there one day, we were, and it was election time here, and everybody was coming through, saying 'I'm running for this and that, that and this, I appreciate your vote.'

DC: Was this a union election?

EN: Union election. [Sneezes] So my buddy says, "Why don't we run for a union job?" [short pause] "I guess." Again now, here I'm not even organized, you know.

DC: You're not in the union at all.

EN: I'm in it.

DC: Oh you are?

EN: I pay my dues, but I'm not paying attention to what the union is, how important it is.

DC: So I'm confused now. The inspection job *was* a union job or was *not* a union job?

EN: It was not. No. [continuing the misunderstanding]

DC: But you were still paying union dues?

EN: Oh yeah. You pay union dues the day you hire into the plant.

DC: Even if you're not considered a—let's see—so you're not management, you're actually, you're in the union.

EN: Most of your hourly people are in the union. Management's not.

DC: Right, salaried.

EN: Salary, right. Salary's not unionized, but the people in the plant, the workers, are. Some salaried are organized today, but that's here and there.

DC: So the inspector job was a union job, but you didn't pay much attention to the union—is that what you're saying?

EN: Still, you know, not knowing that this protection is here for me. You see what I'm saying?

DC: So you were in the union, but you just weren't paying attention to it.

EN: Right. Right, there you go.

DC: I gotcha.

EN: It was there, and I'm sure, at times, they had been around to see me, but it just didn't rub in to me—"Well hi, how are you doing today."

DC: Now I'm with you. OK.

EN: OK. So I'm sitting there at the table at my inspection bench in receiving, and buddy says, "Let's run for union office." It was coming up to that, you know. "Well, why not? I guess." So here I am jumping into the fire, not knowing anything about it. Haven't even read a contract book. And we went out there and started campaigning, and got elected. I said, "Whoa." I didn't think I was going to get elected, you know. So, "Hey. What am I going to do now?"

DC: What position was it?

EN: Committeeman. Yeah. So I went home, and I sat down—I bet you I read that contract two or three times that weekend. I had never read a contract book. It was getting serious now. I was elected to do a job.

DC: And what year are we in now? When was this?

EN: Oh my Lord. Probably 1971, maybe.

DC: So this is way down the line, in '71.

EN: Yeah. Yeah. Walter Reuther got killed in 1970, and that's when I kind of woke up to the union, really. It just stuck to it for some reason, you know. I guess the news medai, all showing this, kind of shoved it in to me, you know. This is what my union's all about, you know. Got me motivated, don't you see. From then on, I've been in the union, as an officer, one way or the other. Everything—a lot of different hats, OK. Edited the paper, and stuff like this, and different titles.

DC: Let's sneak up on that a little bit, because we missed a decade. At one point you mentioned the '58 layoffs—the 1958 recession and all that—how long did that last? And what did you do?

EN: It lasted a year or so. What did I do in the meantime? I did every kind of job you can think of.

DC: Can you remember some of them?

EN: Yeah. Oh, definitely. Most of it was with a fence company, putting up cyclone fences. And they didn't have power posthole diggers. If they did it was very scarce, yet. Hand operated—and the soil in this country is hard rock clay. Oh boy. We dug those things all day long. Our hands got very calloused. But we had to, you know.

DC: How did it pay compared to working at Ford?

EN: Oh come on. The guy—it wasn't even unionized. He sent us out on a job, no money to buy gas, didn't pay us half the time.

DC: Really?

EN: Oh yeah. It was rough. It was really rough, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, he'd send us out on a job, didn't even—you know, we got back, and we did, or we didn't. That's how bad it was.

DC: You'd just hope for the best?

EN: But you had to have a job to pull in a few bucks or pennies, whatever you could, you know, without losing anything.

DC: Did you stay in touch with Ford, to monitor when they might be hiring and all?

EN: Yeah. They gave us—we got so much money—strike, yeah, strike fund money, from our union, you see. [probably meant SUB pay] But we had to pick up other jobs to compensate us because it wasn't enough, you see.

DC: What else did you do besides work for the fence company?

EN: That was about it. We stuck it out with it, and then had to push the guy to pay us, you know. And finally one of the guys went off as a side business out of it, on his own—fencing company. And still stayed at Ford's too. But this other guy folded up, you know. Yeah, we used to dig the postholes—I remember one incident, really, this huge fence we was putting up. Well we noticed this lady standing in the door, watching us all day, just about, you know. We dug these postholes every day. There she is, watching us. Come out on the porch and watch us. "Hi. Good morning!" you know. We got these postholes all dug, got them all cemented, lined up. And the next day, we're ready to put the fence up, and she says, "You know, you're not on the line." We said, "Excuse me!" Hey, well, that's not our problem, but we sure did all the work. We got hold of the boss, "the lady says we're not on the line here." Sure enough, we weren't on the line. Had to take all those posts out.

DC: After you put them all in.

EN: In that work, you got a lot of turmoil. We was over in the village, what they call the village, putting all these new homes in. It was a bad layout over there. Lines were going up the middle of people's driveways. Really, oh, what a mess. We went over there and put a nice fence up one day, got those posts all lined up, come back the next day, they was like this. [All tilted.] And they had done it before the cement dried. They said, "Well, my kids didn't do that." "OK, that's all right." You had to baby-sit every job.

DC: No kidding, until they were all set and dried. So were you ever concerned about making ends meet during that time?

EN: Uh, no. Cara was working at Moray's Jewelers, too. Yes, at that time. So we just made it work out. And didn't lose anything. Didn't give up anything. We had a camper, and that was it.

DC: Were you—let's see, I forget where you were living then—did you own your own home then?

EN: OK. That's good. I got a job at Ford's, everything was looking good, you see. And Cara's parents loaned us the money for the down payment on our first house. It was on Kansas St., right out here [in Ypsilanti]. It was $800, down payment. Now the payments were, like, $76 a month thereafter—FHA, I think it was. It was a great—I mean—you know, then it was as rough as it was today, the money you make—everything goes up, or it's at the level where you're controlled, at that point. We kept it, yeah. We did this, and pulled in enough money to do it, you see. Yeah. So that was our first house.

DC: How long did you stay there?

EN: Twelve years, then things started, you know, the job's getting better, money's getting better. And we decided, well, we liked the country. You know, a subdivision's not it, you know. So we moved to Milan, Michigan. OK. And we was there five years. And we started going to the Irish Hills—you know where that is?

DC: Yeah, way out near Brooklyn.

EN: Uh huh. Yeah. We liked it out there. We'd seen this house, sitting beside the road for years. Went out there, and Cara says that she liked that. And I stopped one day to check on it, and the guy across the street says, "It's not my house. He's not going to sell it anyway." So I said, "Can you tell me who owns the house, sir?" "The guy next door there owns it." "OK, thank you." Well we knocked on the door, hoping this gentleman would come out, and he says, "Yes?" I says, "You own the house next door?" He says, "Yes." I said, "Would it be for sale?" "Well, come on in." "Well, OK." So I did, and we talked for about four hours that morning. It got really—you know, a lot of things happened. So he said, "Well, if you like it, bring the mistress down to look at it, and we'll talk price." Well we did, and Cara loved it, and I did too. Had to dig it out of the woods—been vacant for fifteen years. They all had taken over everything. It was built in 1829 too.

DC: 1829.

EN: Yeah. So a lot of history there. So we bought it. Come back, got an offer, sold our house, paid cash for it, that was it. In 1970.

DC: Is that where you are now?

EN: Yep. That's where I'll be till the end, you know. But then we had a yard sale, about five years later, and several people came over and said, "Did you buy this place?" We said, "Yeah." "He wouldn't even talk to us." I said, "Well, I don't know what to tell you.

DC: Caught him on a good morning!

EN: I guess it was! Yeah.

DC: It sounds like you were really looking to be in the country, and you found it.

EN: Yeah, yeah. That was it.

DC: So were you still driving in to work then, from out there?

EN: Uh huh, 26 miles, from there to the parking lot. So I did it for, like, twenty years or better. No accidents! Wouldn't want to do it the way people drive out there today on US-12.

DC: You said you started out with a 30-minute commute when you first worked at Excello, so you were used to driving.

EN: Right. Yes. There were a lot of things in Detroit then. I mean it was just—you know, we had that apartment on the street, at two or three I come home, I hear something—bang! crunch!—these people were pushing these cars up on the sidewalk, to get their parking place. I couldn't believe it. I got like, oh I'd say altogether, about twelve tickets in Detroit for parking in No Parking zones. Maybe parking in front of a crosswalk, you know.

DC: Is that because the factories were in neighborhoods and all?

EN: Well there was just no place to park. We had an apartment on the street. And everybody made room. I didn't do any crunching and pushing and shoving—I might have walked six blocks away from my car to get home up there. That's why I was just glad to get out of the city, because this isn't me. I'm used to wide open spaces, you know. And that's what it's all about. So it's best I left anyway.

DC: Let's think about what you did when you got rehired, then. You said you were out for about a year in the '58 recession.

EN: Uh huh.

DC: And when you came back, what did you do? What was your job then, when you came back to Ford

EN: I come back as what I left.

DC: Oh you had the same job.

EN: Uh hum. Yeah. Back on inspection. And that was it.

DC: Was there any other job you wanted? Or was that . . .

EN: No, you couldn't *ask* for a better job. It was an off-line operation, you know. Say you had to go to the bathroom, you'd go to the bathroom yourself.

DC: You had control over those sorts of things.

EN: Yeah.

DC: What kinds of pressures were there on your job?

EN: Uh, you had to—boy, the people on the line, when you reject their stuff, then they would get irritated. "Oh, I don't see nothing wrong with that." "Well, it is wrong. It's not right," you know. Everybody wanted to get done early or something and just do it and get done. Well, you're an inspector, and it's a little bit, you know, like being a policeman, I guess. You want a quality part out the door here, and if it's not good enough, you're not—and this is not good enough here. You don't have this rivet tightened up. Or you got a missing rivet. No. It's no good.

DC: Could there be any consequences for those workers? Could they get warned or anything?

EN: Oh yeah. Yeah. The company could make it hard on them, then that put you in the middle, because here I am picking on my brothers and sisters, we say. "And they're going to get wrote up, Neal, because you said it ain't good. Come on, give us a break." "No." Gee, you know. That's just everyday pressure, you know. But I tell you what, my General Foreman explained it to me more than anything. He says—because I got irritated one night—I had a box of rejected stuff, and—it's Quality Control, is what I worked in. It was the Quality Control Department. That was the name of it, you see. Now I asked my supervisor, "Why did you OK that to go back on the line. I had it rejected. It's no good." "Well come here, Neal. We'll talk." "OK." "Did anybody explain it to you?" I said, "I guess not. I'm here to go over the book, and now you say it's OK to run those rejected parts. I don't get it." He says, "Well, we work for the company." "Right." "They hire us to keep these parts within this spec right here, that you're holding the men to. But they have the upper hand, to say, if these parts are functionally good yet, that we're going to go ahead and use them." "Oh. Well." I didn't know that, you see. In other words, they want you to try and control it. You're like a policeman. They want you to try to control, to keep them within these specs right here. When they go out of these specs, then they have the upper hand to make the decision as to whether it should go on out the door or not. Well, that could be good or bad. A lot of times it was bad, because, you know, today it's a little bit different. Quality caught up with us. Japan, and China, and all these, hey, they started putting quality *parts* out there. That made us wake up. We've got a competition now, worldwide.

DC: [Looking at faces in the door window] Folks are checking in on us there. So what was your impression? It sounds like what you're saying is that management was willing to be less concerned about quality than you were, at that point in time.

EN: Yeah, because I think the main point was get it out the door, whether it's good or bad.

DC: OK.

EN: It was. Yeah. It was. Today it's not like that. That supervisor, management, is just as responsible for that quality part as the people making it, because we're part of it now. We have more say so on quality in the plant now, and more say so in running the jobs, OK. And that's the way it should be.

DC: So how did you feel then when he told you that, basically, you were being too strict with your decisions?

EN: Well I just slacked up. I felt, well, then I took that—to saying, 'well, if they bought this before, then I'm not going to be so hard on my brothers and sisters next time. This was bought before, so we'll let it go this time then.' So they got it—management kind of gives you the idea, you make the decision. See what I'm saying?

DC: Yeah. Yeah.

EN: But I did the inspection the best that I could. And I always had the quality in my mind, too. "No, I wouldn't want that on my car." Sometimes they were set a little strict, I think, because, you know, I don't worry about a little piece here or there, as long as it's not a safety factor, OK? So I would say, "I would have that on my car, yeah." Make that kind of decision.

DC: So that what was going through your mind, whether or not you'd want that on your car.

EN: Right. Yeah. Because like I said, it's what they call the "final check," before it goes to the assembly line. That was it.

DC: Was your foreman under pressure to make sure parts were not rejected. Did that reflect poorly on your foreman, if parts got rejected? [short pause.] Does that make sense, or not?

EN: Not my foreman. You see Quality Control foremans—the production foreman, it might be a reflection against him or her.

DC: But not your foreman. Got you.

EN: No, not my foreman. He's my quality foreman. He works for the Quality Department, you see? Yet we work for the Company. All of us do.

DC: So the General Foreman's responsible for the whole works, is that the deal?

EN: The Production General Foreman. You see we have the same line of classification in the Inspection Department. Well, you had Inspection that works for Ford as well as the Production Foreman that works for Ford's, you see. But the Company tells the Inspection Department, "We want you to hold to these specs right here now, OK. If there's anything other, we'll make the decision, see. Our management will make the decision.

DC: All I was getting at was, you know, just what pressure would be on whomever. You said that they wanted the parts out the door—then maybe there was some pressure on them to . . .

EN: I may see my Inspection Foreman and Production Foreman were talking at the coffee machine or something, and come over and say, "OK, let it go." Yeah. Yeah. OK.

DC: So during those years inspecting, did you ever come across the grievance procedure, or did you ever have any . . .

EN: Union involvement?

DC: . . . union involvement at all? Or was that just off in the distance to you?

EN: Just off in the distance, at that point. Yeah, because—ou know, people might go through their whole life and never use a union representative. They just do their job, and—well, just do their *job*. Be to work every day, do their job, and not have any problems, is what I'm saying. I would say, they just—like, I'll give you an instance—one day a lady—I was a union rep then, a committeeman . . .

DC: So this was in the '70s.

EN: Yeah, in that area. Yes. When I was a committeeman. And I had a little more experience. It might have been my second election, OK? Now she come over and said, "Neal, I want my job back." I said, "Well, excuse me, what job?" "Well, I'm sitting on the front of the line up here, now he wants me down here after twenty-seven years? Come on!" "Well, I'll find out why." So I go, and ask the supervisor, "Why are you moving her down here after twenty-seven years?" He said, "After all, it's [?] down here." "What's her classification?" "She's an assembler, Neal. And that's what she's doing now." "OK. Why have you moved her down there." "Well she knows the job, I'm short of help today,

and I need her there for the day." "OK." Well, you know, she is an assembler, so they can move her anywhere they want, as long as it's not discriminatory—picking on her—he'd have to move everybody. But this given day, he did have people short. She never could understand that. She got real mad, said, "I've been up there," you know, "the union ain't doing me no good at all." I said, "Well ma'am, now you are an assembler. He's got a right to use you here today. You're more experienced with the job. You know it.

DC: So did she have any rights at all to her original job?

EN: Well she had her original—see, he could move her from day to day.

DC: Can he move her forever? Or just on an emergency basis, depending on . . . ?

EN: Well, he's got a right to assign within your classification, you see. So she was in her classification as an assembler. She just felt, 'I've done that job up there on the front all my life as an assembler. Why do I have to come down here as an assembler?'

DC: All right. But they had the right to assign her anywhere within that classification.

EN: Yeah! Right! Unless it's discriminatory for some reason. I would check that out, you know. Yeah, he has the right to move her around. But she couldn't understand that, because she thought she owned that job there.

DC: Right. OK.

EN: No, she don't. Uh uh. No, you don't own that.

DC: Do you remember any strikes at all? You were saying—I'm thinking more in the '60s, you know, when you went back to Ford's after that '58 layoff. Do you remember any times when there were any strikes at all in your plant?

EN: No, that's mostly it. At least that I've been through. We've been on strikes helping other people. Yeah, I got thrown around on that one, up here at the ladder company.

DC: When was that?

EN: Oh, Lord have mercy. [pause] Probably, about the middle of the '70s.

DC: And what happened then?

EN: Well, we were supporters of other people that's on strike. So a ladder company is in Ypsilanti here, you see? And we was up on their strike, walking the picket

lines, we call it, OK, and they kept bringing their scabs in. We call people that go against us "scabs," OK. So we're standing on the sidewalk, and here comes the police down, escorting the scabs in. Well we don't want that. We have a right to be out there striking. We have every right. We have a right to say, "Hey, don't let them in." But these were the [ugly?] ones, I guess, and they felt a little macho, a little bullish about it: "Step aside! We're coming through!" Well we—"I said, step aside!" We didn't listen. "You don't go aside, we're going to throw you aside!" Well, then our top VIPs from international was down here, so I was standing here this given day, you know, when they was bringing them in. Beside was the fellow there with me, from the International. Well, I guess my buddy wouldn't move, so the policeman put his arm around his neck, and his billy club and pulled him back, and I went to reach up and said—about the time I went to reach up, one grabbed me by the collar, threw me down, hit my knee on the railroad track, swelled up about like that [hand measurement]. Yes. Very mad. But being a police officer, I couldn't hit him or anything else. I said, "Whoa, wait a minute!" Well we went to the hospital, got it X-rayed and everything, you know, and couldn't walk on it. And put a lawsuit in against the city, see, "Hey, c'mon!" And that day ended. They didn't come in. There was just so much commotion, they didn't come in. The next day, we had one officer come down, elderly, and he talked to us. He says, "You know, my father was a union man. And I respect the union. And I'm going to be here today. Ain't nobody coming in. Ain't nobody coming out." Ain't nobody coming in. No scabs. He said, "Don't put me between a brick wall and the deep sea here." I said, "That's all we want. We just don't want those scabs in here working. "Nobody will come in today, whiles I'm here." That's all we ask for. Now see, the others come down, roughneck, "Get out of the way! We'll run the show! You ain't nothing!"

DC: So is that what happened?

EN: That's what happened! Yeah. Then the fight resolved, OK. I was off, because I couldn't go back because of my knee, and that was it. But it got resolved, and that's how it works out on the picket line. It gets kind of rough sometimes, you know.

DC: So you were just out there supporting the other workers?

EN: Yeah, that's all. They was choking him, and I just reached up. I ain't touched the other officer or anything. I was just, you know—he was about to reach out and [?] Foomp! Down! This guy, he tripped me, is what he did. I couldn't get my balance. He had the leg out, and over, and I fell, hit my knee on the rail.

DC: It is pretty rare, though, for police to close the plant off, not to escort the strikebreakers in, the scabs in.

EN: Yeah. Yeah. Well sometimes it would get very bad at places, but this one did. He didn't do it. He said no. Took it on his own, I guess.

DC: Back to the '60s, at Ford's—I mean those were turbulent times nationwide. I don't know what it was like in Ford's—ut what was it like—what was the racial makeup in the workforce and all that? Do you remember anything going on at Ford's? Were there many African American workers at that time?

EN: I really didn't pay much attention, you know. As far as—you know—actually, you know, I was raised up in the country, in West Virginia, and black and white never was in the picture with me. I never thought of racial things or nothing—in fact I remember, when I was in high school, that me and [?] Rogers, a black fellow, we was just kids [hard to decipher] and swam together, and everything. My wife had a problem, though. There *was* prejudice. When we were married, she was still teaching some school in the meantime, her dancing, before I came. Lincoln School. They did have the black and white schools down here, see. The Lincoln School was the black school.

DC: This was in West Virginia?

EN: In West Virginia now. And Cara—the school contacted Cara—because we lived like in the mix of black and white there, and no problem, you know. I still never thought anything about black or white, to me.

DC: Was that out in the country, in West Virginia?

EN: Well, no. It was in the city—when this happened. See, Cara lived in the city, and I lived in the country. But I come down, and we were there. I guess she made arrangements to teach dancing—ballroom, ballet, and tap, to kids. That's what she taught. And Lincoln School called her up—which was a black school—and Cara said, "Yeah." So, that was it. And she taught for about two weeks, I guess. So I'm sitting there in the living room one day, and it was the phone rang, and Cara walks over and picks it up, and she's talking, and says, "Who is this?" I was getting the sense of what they were saying, you know. She says, "Who am I talking to?" They hung up [hard to decipher]. I said, "Honey, what was that about?" She said, "Well, somebody was telling me I better quit teaching at the black school." So see, that was the first time I come across—that wasn't right, you know?! To me, it wasn't right. Today. So that was the first indication of prejudice, or whatever.

DC: Did she stay at the school, or did she leave?

EN: No, she left. She said no. And that's when we came on to Detroit then, you see, OK? And that was it. Today, "You keep teaching, honey." That's what I'd say. But it can get rough and mean and dirty. We come through those times, you know, in the '60s, right, when it all started.

DC: I'm just wondering if you saw anything going on in the plants that . . .

EN: That were prejudiced, or, not really.

DC: How did whites and blacks get along?

EN: OK, as far as I know. We had—we've had fights in the plant, but there might be a [?] of reasons. There might have been boyfriend or girlfriend reasons, you know. I guess that's why they didn't want to hire husbands and wives in the plant, back then, you know, because of problems, you see. But, no. No. I didn't see any—honestly, I couldn't—maybe—never even gave it any—I've never in my life really—of a black person being any different from me, or me any different from them. And that's the way it is in the union. There's no color in our union. I bet there's people in the plant—yes, it's Southerners now—I have to say that—that brought the issue up at me, and I said, "Well I'm sorry you feel that way." "I'm not voting for you next time." I said, "Well, I wouldn't really want your vote if that's the way you feel, next time." That's what I told them.

DC: Well let's talk more about some of those cases—this is when you were a union rep?

EN: Uh huh.

DC: Talk about some of those cases. What stands out in your mind when you were a rep? What kinds of cases?

EN: What stands out real good—I was fighting real hard for this black lady in this department, and the whole department was really—yeah—mostly Southern, I guess.

DC: Southern white?

EN: Um huh. Yeah. And I knew most of them too. Well, being a Union man, I fight for everybody, and I usually didn't particularly like this black lady, you know. They said she didn't work, and whatever, but I asked the supervisor, I says, "Does she do her job?" "Yeah, she does her job, Neal." "Well that's all I care about then."

DC: What was the issue? You say you were representing her.

EN: She was medical, on a medical—worker's comp. So they could find a job for her, but it may be your job. That could be her job. That's what this was coming down to.

DC: So she was restricted? There were some jobs she couldn't do?

EN: Right. And they were saying to me, "There ain't a job in that department that she can do. She's got to go out of here, Neal." Well I said, "Well, I don't know about that now." And the labor rep was determined to get her out of there too, at that time. And that's what I had to deal with. And the bottom line, he said, "Neal, she's going out of there whether you like it or not." And I said, "Well, now you've really got me. She ain't going nowhere." You know. "You ain't going to use words like that around here, my friends."

DC: Why do you think they wanted her out?

EN: They just didn't like her. I guess she, to them, wasn't part of the clique, or I don't know what the problem was. She was doing her job, though, you see. So it come down to this point, that "You find her a job, she's staying there, Neal. Otherwise, she's going out of there. I think she's going out of there anyway," the labor rep said. "Ah, I don't think she's going anywhere." OK, so she couldn't lift—I got her restrictions—she couldn't lift anything over thirteen pounds. Well everything was heavy in there. But there was a coil job—all she had to do was put a little six-coil in there, that all weighed about six pounds, OK? Put a little [hard to decipher]. Well I come down to this white girl's job. [made some gesture or expression that causes laughter] So I said, "Yeah, I found a job for her." So I went back through there that day, and [hard to decipher—to the effect of informing the white worker that she was being replaced for the day] you can take off if you want to, and this is what she told me. She said, "I see you represent the niggers now." "Whoa! No! I represent everybody in my union." "Well, if she gets my job, you ain't going to be elected next time." And that's when I said, "Well, I tell you what—"There's fourteen in this department, Neal, and they're not voting for you." "Well, so what! If that's the way you feel, I don't want your vote!" And sure enough, about three years later, the election come up again—she got her job. She stayed there and the girl went.

DC: Oh really.

EN: Yes. Yes. I'll let you know that. I won the battle. Yes.

DC: And what happened to the white worker then? Did she just leave entirely? Or did she get another job?

EN: She got moved to another area. Another department, yeah. [Laughing.] So I was glad to see that. You know, the way it was going down, the way you feel. So the next election came up, nobody'd say nothing to me. I walked by the water fountain, getting a drink of water—didn't campaign. Didn't bother. I knew how they felt. [hard to decipher]. And I made it. They didn't have the votes. I made it anyway. Got elected again. Yeah, got elected again. Well, I

went through that whole time. And then I don't remember representing the whole three years in that department. But then the next election come around again, they—I walked to that water fountain to get a drink of water, and two or three of them walked in, said, "How you doing Neal?" I said, "I'm doing good. How're you doing?" "Give me your card, I'm voting for you." I said, "Now—" "No, we mean it. We mean it." "Well, I appreciate you doing that." So time does heal, and time does wake people up, you know, I guess.

DC: Were there other black women in that department? Or was she the only one?

EN: The *only* one. Yes, as I recall, the only one in there, yeah.

DC: It was all women in that department?

EN: No. No. Men and women, see. They was stuck together tight, you know. Now you know—I shouldn't say names here—mark that out. I don't want to name—but this person, sure, [mumbles a bit] not an aggressive worker, OK, but as long as she did her job, that's all that mattered to me. And hey, there's no problem here. There's a job where she is—she's got it. It wasn't long after that, the labor rep got moved. You know, I guess they kind of figured if you can't win cases for us, we don't want you. [laughing] It was great.

DC: What other kinds of cases did you work on when you were a committeeman?

EN: Yeah, you mean troubled times? Or people who had problems?

DC: Whatever. That's part of your job, isn't it?

EN: Yeah. It gets kind of tacky sometimes, you know. You may—you know, people get privileges from the supervisor, you know—longer lunch periods, or whatever, and bigger breaks and stuff. But you have people that want to just come in and do their job, and not be pushed all night—"I don't want to get done early, Neal. It wears me out. I like to sit here and do my job, and do it in [spacely?] and that's it." I'd get in these jobs, you know, and then the line would get mad at me. "Well Neal, come on. We all—"Hey!" "We want to get done early here." "Well, this person doesn't. I'm sorry." Well, hey. The foreman would come around: "OK Neal. You want to slow this line down, they're going to lose their break—they're going to lose their extra time." Oh boy, here we go—putting more pressure on me, you see.

DC: So they're thinking about the pace of work.

EN: Yeah. Yeah. This person doesn't want to be shoved and get these parts through real quick. They want to work at a nice, comfortable pace.

DC: But there were other workers who wanted to go real fast and have time left over.

EN: Yes. Yes. You see what I mean? If this one person says they want this line to the contract, or to the time limits, or whatever it is, you know, then it has to be. I'll give you another fine example of that. Let you work it out the best way you can, OK? There used to be a north line and a south line upstairs—distributors. I get a call one night, "Neal, this line's moving too fast, south side." I go up there, and OK, I timed it, "Yeah, it's really moving fast." It was moving like twenty-two a minute. It's supposed to be like fourteen a minute. OK. "Slow it down." So they slowed it down. I thought, well, while we're here, we might as well slow that other line down, that north line. I walked over there, and tell the supervisor, "Yeah, that was moving too fast too—slow it down." Well, I got myself in hot water. That line didn't call me. Two or three of them went, "Neal, what are you doing over here?" "Well, I thought this line was running too fast." "We didn't call you, did we?" "No, you didn't." [laughing like he got busted]

DC: You could only act if someone calls you in.

EN: Yes. Right. Yes. Yeah. That's it. So I shouldn't have bothered with it, you know what I mean?

DC: So who set the pace of the line, then?

EN: Time study. Yeah. Time study comes down and checks it out, you see. We'd take all this in union classes, time study and everything, but then the Company has to have their people come down. You can stand there with him and watch your watch too, and disagree with him, if you think it's different, but we had a good time-study person then. He worked with us well. I mean, he'd say, "Yeah, it's too fast. Slow it down."

DC: Did you have a regular job as well as being a committeeman? When you were a committeeman, was that your full-time job?

EN: That's a full-time job. Yeah. You've got your own union office over there, like this [referring to the office in the union hall where we were sitting]. You had your own desk and everything, write your grievances up.

DC: How many grievances would you have to write up?

EN: How many a day?

DC: Yeah.

EN: Oh, I don't know. Maybe five, six.

DC: Five or six a day?

EN: Yeah. Maybe, well, yeah, you're going to have some, because of being short pay, and so forth, and overtime—where somebody worked out of the wrong classification, and you weren't scheduled in. Yeah. Yeah, you'd have five or sex a week.

DC: Now would you ever try to work these things out before you wrote up a formal grievance?

EN: Yeah, sure. You'd go talk to the supervisor. "Well, I'll pay it, Neal." "OK, fine."

DC: So some of them would get resolved before you'd actually write the grievance?

EN: Yeah. A pay shortage, though, is a little different. You've got three days to put a grievance in, you see. So you don't want that to get by you. Because if he'd [the foreman] say, "Oh, I took care of it, Neal." Yeah, you took care of it all right. I didn't see that paycheck.

DC: A verbal agreement is not good enough there?

EN: Right. Personally, I feel, in a business, verbal agreements aren't enough. In this case, you know, because they're management and I'm union. So it's best you don't agree with the foreman. You get him to sign it. Write up, let him read it, and sign it, you see. If they don't want one, then write one up and let them sign "I don't want representation." Then let them sign it, you see. Then they can't come back and sue you, you see. We don't want to get sued, and say, 'we didn't write a grievance' for so and so.

DC: What would happen next then? Once the grievance was written, what would happen next?

EN: Well, you'd have a little discussion with the supervisor. You'd go back, and say, "Now, here's the problem we had on this time, pay shortage. [short mumbling] "No I'm not, Neal." "Oh, well you know it's wrong. Are you going to sign it?" "I'm not having a discussion with you." Well, the next is the General Foreman. His boss. And tell him what you have here, and he'll either OK it or he won't OK it.

DC: How often would you meet?

EN: Well, as soon as possible, in other words. As soon as possible.

DC: Did you have regularly scheduled meetings, or would you just meet when you needed to?

EN: Well, mostly when you went to Labor Relations and argued your grievance, you had a labor representative that you would go down and talk your grievances over with, OK?

DC: Would that be from the UAW Regional?

EN: No, that's Company.

DC: Company labor reps?

EN: Company labor reps, you see. That's after you saw the Foreman and General Foreman now. Then the labor rep is next, you see. And you'd go down and talk the grievance over with the labor rep. He may OK, it. He may not. Let's say he does, then that stops it right there then. OK? He signs it, and they get paid whatever. If he doesn't, then that comes back to the bargaining committee. We had two bargaining committees in the union. You turn your grievance into them, they argue it next with management, you see? If they don't get their way with it, it goes to the third stage—that's to the chairman. And then that goes up to be argued up with an umpire.

DC: OK.

EN: That's how it works, OK?

DC: Did any of your cases ever go to the umpire?

EN: Yeah, sure they did. And we've won. Yeah.

DC: Do you remember any?

EN: Oh, Lord. Not offhand, I don't. It was so many—I won a lot of them, you know. A lot of people say, well you may somehow be appeasing the people, because it could be right, or it could be wrong. That's true. I agree to that. But, you never know when it might backfire, you not having that grievance—say I didn't write it, you know. Hey, what's a piece of paper? OK, it's the company, right?

DC: It sounds like you're saying that as long as you wrote that grievance, then it could get resolved—the rightness or wrongness could get resolved later on.

EN: Right! That's the way I feel about it, you know. So I wrote a lot of them. I'm not trying to appease nobody, but you never know what might come out of it you overlooked, or something. You can come back and get slapped in the face with it, you know.

DC: How did you feel about how that system worked? Did you think it was a good system?

EN: I think so. Yeah, I really do. I think it was good to be—a good system. I think if you can work it out with management, it's even better, you know. Some of these supervisors, they just—I think the best supervisor over people in the plant, like a foreman, is someone that's worked on the line, worked in the plant for years, and come up. They understand people better. You hire somebody right out of college to be a supervisor, they haven't enough to do with people yet. A people person, I'm trying to say, that understands the problems, you know.

DC: What was the case here at Ford's? Who were they hiring to be the foremen?

EN: Uh, I think—well it's been twelve years since I've been out.

DC: Well, back when you worked. I don't mean now. I mean back when you were there.

EN: Well, people come off the line.

DC: They still did. In the '70s?

EN: Yeah. And then, a few college ones, engineers that come in and decided they wanted to come on the floor and work instead of being an engineer, you see. But hadn't been on the floor to work production, and didn't know what it's like out there, in the heat, and whatever, you know.

End of Tape I, Side B

BeginTape II, Side A

DC: . . . [talking about labeling tapes] We're good. So anyways, that's a train-of-thought interrupter, isn't it.

EN: Let's see, where were we at? We were talking about how hot it was in the plant. Yeah. It's cleaned up a lot today. I mean we had this Q-1, where it had to be clean—in the '80s, that come about—we worked hard, we got it. And the plant now is really nice. Now it's air-conditioned. It wasn't before. A lot of the jobs, like the shock job is out, and it's starter work now, and things like that. We used to make a lot of things there—distributors, shocks, horns, heaters—but it's all been—they've got the new heater plant in Sheldon Rd. you know, now—it moved there, you see.

DC: Why was the shock job so much harder? You said that was really hot.

EN: Well, you were dealing with oil—we have the bumper shock, you know, but it's not as mass-produced as was the shock job. I mean the Ford shocks go on a car, you know. So, when you come out the struts and so forth, no. It's just the machinery that makes it hot. It's in the air, you know. It's the fans and stuff—it's just not compatible. It's really hot in the plant. In the summers, it's like that in there today. But the bumper shocks, you know you try to keep the smoke out. You're breathing the smoke, and stuff like this. And it's really difficult.

DC: Now who worked in the shock department?

EN: Who worked in it? Well.

DC: It sounds like it wouldn't be a very desirable job.

EN: No, it isn't. But it depends, you know, what job you're on. But a welder and so forth, the sparks and everything, you know, the eyestrain all day, and the smoke that doesn't get all sucked out through the ventilation pipes. You're breathing a bunch of this. So some of the jobs were a little bit rougher. The smell of oil and so forth. But making these parts, it can't be helped. The paint booths and stuff like that, you know. So all people were in there, and you do the best you can. Safety does the best it can. We used to have to tell management to keep the suction tubes clean, so it keeps the smoke out, and stuff like that, you see, and the fumes and the smell and so forth. But most of those jobs have been dissolved now. Mostly we've got just the starter and generator—the distributor now is just—see if I can get the name together for you now—synchronizer, they call it. Where, you know, you got your coil, your [?] coil, the high-efficiency coils now, for your spark and your car and everything. Cars today are not like they were back in the '50s and '60s. The muscle cars, we called them. The Dream Cruise that we just had in Detroit here. You get the cars you can work on then. Today you can't work on them unless you got a computer to plug into. That's what it's like.

DC: When you were working as a committeeman, did your local union ever get involved in any political campaigns, or anything like that?

EN: Oh definitely. We were always involved in the political campaigns.

DC: Do you remember any of the particular campaigns you got involved in?

EN: All the local politics—you see the union was is very involved in politics because we want people in power that's going to represent us working people. And this election that come up between Clinton [he meant Al Gore] and Bush right now, you see. As our president, Stephen Yokich, says, we vote for the people who help us. Either they're Democrat *or* Republican, OK? But we send to Washington every election time to get the voting records on working issues, up

there, that the House of Representatives or whatever has voted for to help us in all of our working areas. Mostly Democrat, all the way across the board. So what choice do you have? I don't want to cut my throat. I have to be Democratic. That's what I tell everybody. Everybody, you know, they come out with their personal thing—it has been a very personal thing in this presidential election and the past, OK? We all know that. But beyond that, I got to put the personal life off that way—of this person—what has he done for me, to *protect* me? OK? That's what I've got to look at. So that's where we look at the issues. We all don't condone what's happened in the past here. I don't. I wish it had never happened. But still, I got to look, as a working person, who's going to protect me the most, a Democrat or a Republican? A Democrat.

DC: So back in the '70s, when you were a committeeman, what would you do to try to encourage people to vote, their interests in this case? What would you do?

EN: Well, we have certain levels in our union. Standing committees, that heads these areas. We talk politics all the time to anybody—why we have to vote this way, why we vote this way. Now we have meetings downtown, you know. We go to—supporting the Democrat caucus, and so forth. Even in our neighborhoods. We're all living in different counties here, you see. And we support the Democrats in these different areas. So we have meetings in politics, yeah. We all push politics, no matter what level we are, even—we have worker-to-worker programs just getting started now. Amanda Evans is our coordinator. And we just started this committee—in fact, I'm a member of it. We went in there handing flyers out the other day. 'We're not telling you who to vote for. Just read the issues, and see who's done the most for you, here, as a working person.' And that's how we do it. We all are involved in politics.

DC: That's what you're doing now. Back in the '70s, would you just hold meetings? Would you try to encourage people to go to the polls?

EN: Oh yeah. That's what—even back then. Sure. Like I say we have the worker-to-worker committee now. We did it then too. As a committee person—we have a CAP drive, community action program. And that's for political reasons. People back there said, "Well, why are we involved in politics, Neal? That doesn't have anything to do with our job." Well at one time I felt that way. Well, I wasn't into politics. All I wanted was to do my union job. But then I got to thinking, well, what the president of our country does, or some member of a state representative, can hurt me! Back then, look what Reagan did when he fired all the air controllers. They all lost their jobs. Well, by law he could do it. It was there. But we were saying, 'well, that's a little harsh, you know. Come on. Some laws have been changed, you know.' But we felt it was a little harsh to go out there and just get rid of 11,000 people. You're taking their paycheck away from them, and they got a family to feed too.

DC: Absolutely.

EN: So we feel a little more passionate, I guess, towards people than the other party does.

DC: Did you ever get involved in local politics—Ypsilanti politics?

EN: Yeah, our local supports Ypsilanti politics. We just—Ypsilanti politics, on the Democratic side, here. We just had our meetings, and so forth, and they all got elected—in the primary, yes.

DC: Can you remember any local elections of interest back in the '70s, though? I know it was a long time ago, but can you remember any particular issues that were of importance to working people in this plant back then?

EN: [hesitates] I'm trying to think. Are you talking national, or local?

DC: Either. Specifically, I was thinking local, but it could be national as well. I'm trying to get us back into the '70s there if we can.

EN: Well, you know, you're not talking about union elections right here, are you?

DC: I was thinking about political elections.

EN: Political elections, yeah. No, I can't—you see, Carter was in, you know, and then, again he was a Democrat, which was well for us to be pleased with. I think, you know, when Reagan was elected, I think a lot of Democrats crossed over. I've never hidden the fact—I've told my membership this—I've got—you know, I did vote for Reagan the first time, because he was a Democrat, in the movie guilds. And he switched over to being a Republican. And I thought, well, after, you know, Carter, I guess it was—he was good, but he just couldn't get things done. It looked like—it wasn't enough, to us. I thought maybe we do need a change, you know. But after Reagan did what he did to the controllers, I said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait a minute. I can't support this person again." That's—that's, you know. I think a lot of people felt that way, because of the way that he overwhelmingly won, you know, and it couldn't have been all Republicans that voted for him, OK? I was about to—I said, yes I did. I'll be honest with you. I gave this Republican a chance, but it didn't work out. So hey, not again. Not until they can show me that they are for working people.

DC: Do you remember what it was like inside the plant when foreign competition got to be so fierce? Did that affect conditions at all inside your plant?

EN: Yes. I think back in the '50s, when I was hardly—into the '60s, there was a lot of sloppy work. I really do. And I think the people would honestly say the same. Just get it out the door, you know. That's why I say especially it was hard for me, you know. But now, in the last few years—I think it was all like

that those years—then it come to the '80s, here, and all of a sudden, boy, this quality thing kicked in, you know. We're getting kicked down bad because of our bad quality in these plants. So I think everybody realized, whoa, we'd better shape up or we're going to get shipped out. So they did, and everybody come and took more interest in their job. And what helped so much—it's always, "Do as I say," whether it's right or wrong, for management—well if they want us to be a part of this ball team, we got to have a say-so. We got to be able to sit down here and talk this problem out today, in here. No more of management sitting over here running the show today. It's management and the union both sitting here side by side running this shop today.

DC: Do you think that that's different from when you first started?

EN: Yes it is. Definitely. 100% different, I'd say. So it means a lot more today, having more say in the quality and the building of our product.

DC: So if I'm hearing you correctly, it sounds like you're saying that the foreign competition was beneficial.

EN: It was, yeah. Yes! Definitely. I think it got us moving, you know. Yes. It certainly did. And such—today, worldwide is just a moment away. You know, with computers and everything. It's just—if you want something here now from Paris, it'll be here tomorrow, while I'm sitting here tonight. You see what I'm saying? Or Hong Kong, whatever. It'll be here. Global economy has come instantly. Not weeks off when you need something or whatever. So yeah, it's all changed now. Everything's changed. Global economy, they call it.

DC: Did you—back when you were a committee man, when you started to pay more attention to the union—did you pay much attention to your national union leadership. Walther Reuther would have been dead at that point, but did you ever pay attention to what your national UAW leadership was talking about?

EN: Just through the communications that the president would get here—whoever the president was at that time. [pause] Maybe regional, but Solidarity House, not really. I didn't, you know. Maybe not the Region as much either. I just did my job as a committeeman, met contracts, and stayed local-level-like, you know.

DC: Did you ever have any regional or national reps come in to work with you and the committee?

EN: I don't remember as well. I don't think as much as they do today.

DC: Oh, they do more today?

EN: I think so, yeah.

DC: What sorts of things do they get involved in today?

EN: Our regional reps?

DC: Yeah.

EN: Well, they're more concerned about their area, their plant, that they came from, you see. You see, everybody at the Region has come from all the plants around. They move up the ladder. Plant chairmen may go down to Solidarity House, and whatever, you know, and presidents, finance officers, whatever. Whatever could end up there. I never wanted to go that far myself. I liked it locally, right here.

DC: It sounds like you went about your business as a shop committeeman there, kind of independently of the larger union.

EN: Well, always with a mind that if I needed them they were there. But I worked—when you're a committeeman, you work under the plant chairman. He or she is the one you answer to all the time and the one who oversees you all the time as a committee person. You see, the Executive Board, which this is over here, we have nothing to do with any of the problems in the plant. And they have nothing to do with the problems we have here. You see, it's two different levels here. But as far as information—somebody comes in here and says, 'I have a problem,' we'll say, 'well maybe you better talk to the plant chairman or your committee person, because we can't take care of you.' We can't write you a grievance for that, you see. But we can lead them in the right direction. Having this knowledge from both sides helps out, see. So that's the way that works. And vice versa, over there say they got a committee problem, or something, well why don't you stop and see the president of your local, Jerry [in 2000], and that's the way it works.

DC: Did your kids ever go to work in the plant?

EN: Yeah, I got a daughter that works here now. And a son-in-law that works here. She met him, and they got married. He's skilled trade, and Crystal's on clean-up.

DC: How about your other kids?

EN: Oh no, they're in different worlds. Cara, she works at Ford Motors—no, a Ford dealer, Atchinson Ford's in Belleville. And Sherry works for—in Lambertville. Her and her husband lives down there—at a box company, corrugated box company. So they're kind of scattered.

DC: Can you think of other kinds of questions that I should be asking you?

EN: Well, you know, I tell you, when you worked back then, you had to wear a badge, and you know, if you were caught without the badge, they'd write you up, management would. It seems it was something they liked to play with a lot. You had to have it out where they could see it, you know, on your belt or somewhere. And a lot of us got written up for not wearing it, you know, forget to put it on, or something. But today there's no badges. It's all like an honor system. You just come to work, and that's it. You don't punch in. You don't punch out, you see. And you don't have to wear—well, yes, you do have a badge, but you don't have to wear it, as I know of.

DC: You have some kind of identification.

EN: Yeah, it's got your picture on it. You have to—to get through the gates [makes a swiping motion] You show it, it clicks. That's for security reasons, you know. But in the old days, you had to punch your card in and out, and wear your badge, and so forth, you see. Then it went to the system of cards that you punched out and you carried them in your pocket. But then that got abused—like, you know, I want to leave early, give somebody a couple of bucks [laughs]. You know, I got deeply involved. So I think the best thing they did is done away with it all—like they're doing now. And it's better.

DC: OK. Did you ever have to try to defend people who were trying to slip by the system there?

EN: Yeah. Yeah. Yes.

DC: And what was it like?

EN: I said, "It's your fault," supervisor. They'd say they wanted to write somebody because he wasn't there last night. I'd say, "Weren't here? What do you mean? They punched in and out." "Well, they didn't punch out?" "How do you know that? I'll have to ask them. How do you know he wasn't here? He must have been—he punched out. It's your word against his." So it really caused a lot of problems, and I argued for them 100 percent whether they're right or wrong. That's my job as a committee person. I've had people say—sure, they're not always right—my people, I say, but—I'm not going to say it in front of management. I'm arguing for them 100 percent in front of management. You got to prove to *me* that they're wrong. But they'll say, "You got to prove to *me* that they're *right*." And I'll say, "Well, [evasive sounds] . . .

DC: How about behind the scenes, when management's not there. What would you say to some of these people?

EN: Oh, we'd go out and have a cup of coffee, and I'd say, "You know, you really do . . ."—you know, right. I did. And I was certainly about to. I'd take them

out and get a cup of coffee, and say, "You know, you really do have a problem here. You've got to straighten this absenteeism out. You've got to come to work." You've got a substance abuse, or drug, you know. But we've got channels now—there's a lot more there than I had. We had to take care of skilled trades back then. And you had to know all the lines of demarcation. Because a pipefitter comes this far, a millwright takes over from here, and all that jazz. But today, they have their own representatives. We had to take care of alcoholic conditions and everything. But today, we have a ESSP rep.

DC: What's ESSP?

EN: Employee Assistance Program. Like if you have any kind of problem—substance abuse, marital, whatever, you go talk to him. He's a union person, and he makes them feel more comfortable. And then, you tell them what the rules are. The guy getting this program taken care of, if you don't, then you're out the door. And it takes a lot of weight off of each individual committee person, you know, to have to follow through with all of these, you know. You know, I had a girl that worked a week, hired in back there in the '70s, and got fired after a week. An hour and a half for lunch. Oversleeping. Not wearing safety glasses. Come on lady, you can't do that! Jeez! But when you're young, and you get fired, that's on your record the rest of your life. So I went down to Labor Relations—told him in Labor Relations—he said, "I'll tell you what, Neal." I said, "I'd like to clean her record up. This is sad. And her mother worked here." He said, "If she can prove to me in a year's time"—she's out of here now. She's fired. Nothing I could do. "But if she cleans her record up, and has letters of resumes [meaning recommendation?] coming back here showing me that she has straightened up. Good resumés. I'll clean her record." I said, "You'll bring her back to work too?" "Yeah." Well lo and behold, I kept this record for a year, and went back with him—and yeah, he cleared the record, and I called her, and she worked at McDonald's and places like this, and good resumés. And I said, "Would you bring her back to work?" And he said, "Yeah, sure." Called her up, she said, "No, I'm married now, but thank you for doing this." You see what I mean? You have to follow through. That took a year for that, you see. But you got to keep these records, Dan. That's what it's all about.

DC: So how long did you work as a Committeeman?

EN: Two terms. I wanted to come over on the Executive Board side. I liked this better. Recording Secretary for several years, and lots of other little hats—editor of the paper, co-editor too, and all this, other titles. And I'm also Recording Secretary on the Retiree Board, and I got on Executive Board.

DC: When you came over to be Recording Secretary, was that a full-time job as well?

EN: No.

DC: You were working as well?

EN: Right. You get one day over here. Two if necessary. But mostly one day.

DC: So what were you doing while you were Recording Secretary? Were you back to inspecting again?

EN: Right, back to inspection in the plant. I liked it that way, because I'd keep in touch with the people, you see. Most people play politics, "Hey I never see them until the next election." They don't realize you've got work to do. But you get thick skin. You shove it off.

DC: So when did you retire?

EN: In '91. Cara had her aneurism just sitting here, like we're talking, and went in the hospital, and all that. Of course I had time off. I wasn't working. And the doctor come to the point he says, "Well maybe, you better start thinking about what you have to do, Neal. We're going to have to put her in a home now, because she can't stay in the hospital." Until she was ready for therapy. I said, "I'll retire and take her home." And it worked out good. I worked with her all day. They worked with her all day. And of course, give her breaks for rest, you know. But then the cancer came, and there ain't nothing you can do about the cancer. Cancer's a deadly thing.

DC: To recover from the aneurism and then have that.

EN: Yes. So she had two major . . .

DC: Yeah, that's just—that's tragic. I'm sorry.

EN: I know. I appreciate it. Yeah.

DC: Well, can you think of anybody else that I might want to try to get a hold of to talk, because, I mean, I've enjoyed this immensely.

EN: Well, there are probably a lot of things I could go on and on with you, you know.

DC: Can you think of anybody else I should be contacting? Can you think of others that might want to do this, who weren't there at that meeting that day?

EN: Uh, well, you want just retirees, right?

DC: Right now. For the most part—unless, I mean, there's still people working who worked back in the '50s and '60s, then that might work.

EN: Jerry did—the President here. I think he did. Yeah, yeah, he was there in the '60s. I'm sure he was. Andrew too, the Financial [Secretary]. Yes, yeah.

DC: I'll see if I can talk with them. But other retirees—part of what I'm facing . . .

EN: Oh, definitely Jim [?] right there. He could tell you a whole lot, you know. Yeah. He's Vice President. Yeah.

DC: Well, I'll need to contact these guys. I'm going to be in several more times in the next couple weeks.

EN: Well, OK. I can help you out, Dan. I got your call, but we had the Heritage Festival up here, you know.

DC: I forgot about that.

EN: Hey, that was good. We watched the gates up there—volunteered, you know, and it was great.

End of Interview