Tom and Carolyn Romein Interview, Part I
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Clarkston, MI 48346
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DC: OK, let's see. One thing that'll make it easier with a joint interview like this is that your voices will be distinct. You know, sometimes if I talk to two men at once or two women at once, sometimes it's hard to tell later who's who. But I start out with really basic questions, such as where were you born?

TR: OK, I was born in Amsterdam, Holland, or the Netherlands, you should really say.

DC: OK, and when was that?

TR: And it was in May 13, 1945.

DC: 1945, OK. So you are the youngest that I've spoken with so far. And Carolyn, how about you?

CR: I was born in East Cleveland, Ohio. And I was born the 6th of July, 1945, also.

DC: OK, both in 1945. OK. I'll have to try to figure out a pattern or flow for answering the different questions here, but—so I take it your parents are from the Netherlands as well?

TR: Right. Right.

DC: OK. And what did they do? We'll get to you in a second here, we'll kind of . . .

TR: My dad was a blacksmith most of his life. And when he came here, because we came here in the United States in 1962. And he became a welder here with—actually he started off at a tool and die shop, which he had never learned anything. Well he got a job there and he was very successful.

DC: This was after he came to the United States?

TR: After he came to the United States. The only thing is, there were no benefits in that job or anything, so he tried Pontiac Motors and he did finally get hired in as a welder, in the skilled trades, and of course he got the benefits and stuff.

DC: Well, we'll have to sneak up on that. That's like a compressed version of the whole long interview.

TR: It's a compressed version. I guess we'll have to go into that.

DC: No, that's OK. That gives me some sense of the outlines of the story here. But can you give me a sense of what it was like—or you said your father was a blacksmith when you lived in the Netherlands?

TR: Right.

DC: And how long had he been a blacksmith?

TR: He was a blacksmith really since he was about eighteen years old. And he was fifty when he came here to the United States, so that's for quite a long time. He was in shipbuilding in Holland.

DC: OK. So he was a blacksmith in shipbuilding.

TR: Right. Uh-huh.

DC: And so what did it mean to be a blacksmith?

TR: In the old days before they had arc welding like you have now, which is an easy form, they had to do welding in the fire. They had to put a piece of metal there, or they had to [?]; like [?] beams, they had to be bent, you know, in the fire in order to mold them to the ship's contours and stuff. And that was basically what he was doing at the time. And making parts for ships.

DC: OK. Did he tell you how he got involved in that line of work?

TR: He, well he went to technical school in Holland, and this is how really he got involved with that, and that's why he got hired in in the place. And I guess he had a, kind of a mentor that he worked for, you know, in the place there at first. And then that man became . . .he was promoted and he promoted my dad along with him. And so he became actually the main blacksmith and, you know, he used to be his helper first. And so then he became the blacksmith; and then he got a helper, and that's got him rolling into that job, really.

DC: Was he always in the shipyards?

TR: Yeah, he was always in the ship—well, he was in the shipyards until the nineteen—the mid-'50s. And that is when he decided he was gonna—he worked for the city of Amsterdam in the water department. And he was doing blacksmith work for them, in fact. For making collars for pipes and all of that kind of stuff. And only the last two years before we came here, he worked in a grain—it's a, I don't know how you say it here, but it's in the place where they moved grains from the big ships to the smaller ones that was going to the inland waters in Europe. And he was, he did the general maintenance for them also; blacksmithing and welding.

DC: OK. And how about your mother, what was her background?

TR: My mother was a seamstress in the beginning before they got married, actually, and once they had children—they had four; there was three boys and a girl—and then she quit working. She just took care of us.

DC: And when did they get married?

TR: They got married in 1938.

CR: You might add to that, because I've heard a lot of family stories that are *really* quite fascinating; because besides working in shipbuilding, when the war broke out and the Germans invaded the Netherlands, they were sending a lot of people to Germany to work in the war industry. And his name was on the list to be sent to Germany. So a brother-in-law of his . . .

TR: His brother-in-law, he worked for the underground in Holland at the time, during the war, and you know, he found out that his name was on the list to go. And so he said, he told him, "Go work as a fireman for the city or for, you know, and that's for the country, really. And that way, they cannot send you to Germany to build ships." And so that is when he quit his job and he actually, through my uncle, through his brother-in-law, he got the job as a fireman. And so he spent the rest of World War II as a fireman. Both in Germany and in Holland, right near the border, actually, and he was all the time.

DC: OK. So that was to avoid being sent back . . .

TR: So that was avoiding being sent into the German shipbuilding shops and where he would've been otherwise.

DC: Now did the Germans ever come find him and ask him why he was a fireman now and not a blacksmith?

TR: No, because he was, you know, it was all done legally and so they never questioned it. So it's just a nice thing.

CR: He has another story about being a firefighter. And he was in a city close to the German border and he always, when the planes, when the allied planes came over to bomb, would go in this one bunker for protection. And he went in this one bunker one day and there were a couple German officers in there. And he spoke some German, and they were talking that there was a locomotive right above the bunker. And so he said, "Well, I'm going to get out of here." They would have, like, bombing runs. And the German officer said, "Oh, no, you don't have to worry about it. It'll be OK." But when the planes stopped, he ran out of there and another wave of planes came shortly after, and of course they blew up the locomotive and that bunker was gone. Well, his friends came running because they figured he was gone, but he was still safe because he got out.

TR: He was out and the Germans were gone.

DC: So he knew the locomotive would be a target.

TR: Right. He understood that was gonna be a target, which it was, because they blew that up and they blew the bunker up, and that was it. So he was very lucky. And in fact, I wouldn't be here today otherwise.

CR: That's right, he wouldn't be here today.

TR: Because that was before I was born, so . . .

DC: Where were you; you said there were four children in the family?

TR: Right.

DC: And where were you?

TR: I was number three. I had a brother born in 1940 and a sister in '43, and I was born in '45, and I have another brother in '49.

CR: You could also tell him about how your dad went to Indonesia after the war, too.

TR: Yeah, after the war we—because, of course, Holland, you know, Indonesia was part of Holland at that time as a colony. And so, of course after the war, they needed to shore up there because the Japanese took over all of those islands. And so after the war they needed people to clean the place up and get it back to where it was before the war. And so—but you couldn't go as a civilian. So you'd have to join the navy, in fact, to get there. And so my Dad signed up for that and he joined the navy. And they were then told that after a certain amount of time, they would become civilians over there. But to get there he had to join the navy.

CR: He became sergeant.

TR: So he did, and he became a sergeant right away. He was never a private, he was never any—so they went over in 1946. Yeah, he went in '46. And he went over down there and—at a navy base in [?]. In fact, that's where my younger brother was born.

DC: Did the whole family go?

TR: The whole family went. The whole family went a year—he went in '46 and the rest of the family went in '47. And then we came back in 1950 and he came back in 1951. So we spent three years there, but he spent actually five years there.

CR: And he was actually helping unload ships.

TR: He was in charge of unloading, loading and unloading the cargo ships that went from all over the islands over there.

DC: So that sounds like different work from the repair work he had done.

TR: That was much different work than the repair work that he was doing here.

CR: Well he wasn't physically—he had like a crew he was in charge of. He wasn't actually unloading the ships.

TR: He was in charge of—right.

DC: But he wasn't necessarily using his metal working skills, either, it sounds like.

CR: No, this was . . .

TR: No. No, he was doing actually just that kind of stuff. And then when he came back, he went back into shipbuilding in Holland, in Amsterdam.

CR: They had to really leave Indonesia.

TR: They had to leave Indonesia because of the fact that at that time there was a revolt in Indonesia and they had to give up the colonies. And so that is when they shipped everybody back.

DC: Right. Now maybe you told me but it didn't stick, but what motivated your father and your mother to go to Indonesia? Why did they want to do that?

TR: I guess they were looking just for some adventure, some different kind of thing. And it's—I don't know if the pay was well, but you know, they never really talked about what the pay was like for it. But I think they were intrigued by living outside, you know, it's a warm country, of course. There's no snow there, anything. And they, of course they had a—they lived in nice big house, kind of like what you have here, but it's all individual homes and stuff. And in Amsterdam, of course, everybody lives in apartments and, you know . . .

CR: Land is scarce.

TR: Land is scarce, so it's all very small apartments. So I think, especially my mother was always intrigued, and in fact that is why we came to the United States for this very same reason. You know, because there was room to live.

CR: Your Dad really always had a good-paying job. I don't really think it was really for the money but just, they were more adventuresome people; wanted to even better themselves from where they were. And if there was an opportunity, they kind of took it.

DC: This is going backwards, but I'm curious to know if any of your Dad's fellow workers in the shipyard did go back to Germany or were shipped to Germany during the war. Did he ever talk about that?

TR: I have never heard about that. He's never talked about it and I don't even know whether he knows whether they actually did or not because he was, of course, out of there right away.

DC: Right, he went over to the border.

TR: Yeah, because he moved—well, we always lived in Amsterdam still during that time, but of course he was by himself a lot of times that, you know, he was near the border there. So he only came home on weekends and stuff like that. So whether he actually knew who went, that I don't really know.

DC: OK, yeah. I was just curious to know if any of his friends had gone.

TR: Yeah. That's a good question.

DC: All right. A couple more questions—we're gonna go back and forth and probably recycle times and revisit things, but you said your mother was a seamstress but gave up official work, it sounds like, once she married your father.

TR: Right. Right.

DC: Do you remember her using those skills at all when you were younger?

TR: Oh yes. When we were kids, she basically made all our clothes.

CR: And her own clothes.

TR: And her own clothes, she always made her own . . .

CR: And your Dad's shirts.

TR: Yes, she made shirts, she made . . .

CR: Pants.

TR: Shorts, pants, I mean she did everything.

CR: She did that after she came here for quite awhile, too, she made her own dresses.

TR: Oh yeah. Yeah, she's done it for most of her life.

DC: How did she learn to do all of that?

TR: She went to school for that in Holland. They had special schools for that and she learned it. She did it professionally for awhile for in a big company.

DC: OK, for a company.

TR: Right.

DC: And then it sounds like that was the job she gave up when she got married.

TR: Yes, she gave it up when she—when we were actually, you know, when my oldest brother was born. That's when she gave it up.

DC: Did she ever do work out of the house for others?

TR: She did some of that. She did once in awhile, somebody that came and needed something. Yeah, she did some of that in the beginning. I remember [?] growing up, that once in awhile she had stuff at home to do for others.

DC: It seems like almost a natural fit in trying to use those skills.

TR: That's true. You never give that up.

DC: If someone knows that you have those skills then there are people always knocking on your door.

TR: Right, "I need this. I need that."

DC: There were probably plenty more people who had the time and talent to do that kind of sewing. Not necessarily at your mother's level, but I know it's kind of a lost art now.

TR: Right. That's true, you know. That's so true.

DC: Well Carolyn, let's talk a little bit about your background. East Cleveland must be, you know—it's a world away from Amsterdam at this point. But I'm very curious to know because you were born in the same year and all. What was your family background?

CR: Well both my parents were of Czech descent, back a few generations. But my mother was a nurse and she did a lot of home nursing before she was married. But then I have one brother who's three years older than I am. And my dad was a tool and die designer. And he learned a skill, of course, during the Depression his sister took some drawings that my dad had made to a company and then they had my Dad do a few more. And that's how he got the job during the Depression working as a tool and die designer. And he spent really his whole life at several companies doing that. But my mother, once my brother was born, really gave up nursing and stayed mostly a homemaker after that.

DC: When did your parents get married?

CR: 1935.

DC: '35, OK. I'll try to keep all of these time lines straight, but I may slip up now and then. Did your father ever have any official training in this tool and die design?

CR: He had some technical school training, but not much. He had high school training and some advanced training, but not a great deal. He just kind of had a knack for drawing and the designs were good enough that they took him. And then he worked then for Federal [?] for years.

DC: OK. And what did they make?

CR: Bearings for their auto supply company out of Detroit. Their headquarters was in Detroit.

DC: But he worked in the Cleveland . . .

CR: In the Cleveland area. And then shortly before he was ready to retire, Federal [?] closed the plant in Cleveland. And my Dad basically had spent his entire life working for Federal [?] and now if you get laid off from your job or a plant closes, well, there's a lot of people that are in that same situation. But this happened, like, in the early '70s. And it was a shock for my dad and they were both kind of devastated by it because he was, like, two or three years away from retiring. And it sort of sent them into a tailspin of what were we going to do? But my Dad had a lot of contacts through Federal [?], so he got hired, like, right away in a small shop. And he got less money there, but they considered him as the older, the wiser person and so he stayed a couple of more years that he needed until he retired.

DC: OK. Now I'm a little bit unclear about exactly what a designer does. I realize you design the dies and all this, but was there a union at the plant, at Federal [?]?

CR: That I'm not sure about all the years that my Dad worked. I really don't know. He was not union. And he basically was in the office more as an engineer. He didn't have the degree of an engineer, but he was designing the dies and the machinery, that sort of thing. He would go out then on the floor and make sure that it was made properly and that it was operating properly. I believe they did not have a union at the time, but I'm not really sure about that.

DC: Probably not when he started, for sure, if it was in the Depression. But there were some odd lines of division between union jobs and management jobs when it comes to design and engineering and all that, and so I wasn't quite sure which side of the divide he'd been on.

CR: My Dad was always very adamant with both of our boys that they should go to college because I think he would've had more chance for promotions or that sort of thing if he'd had a degree, a college degree, than what he had, since he didn't have that degree.

DC: And you said your mother was a nurse. Did she go to a nursing training . . .

CR: She went through Case Western Reserve. It was only Western Reserve then, for—but she

was an RN. And she worked in hospitals and she did private duty nursing until my brother and I were born.

DC: OK. Did she ever talk about missing that sort of work?

CR: I don't think she really missed that kind of work. The stories that she used to tell, different from today as far as nursing, in her training everything had to be sterile. They had to follow proper procedures and she said in the later years, now when people get staph infections in the hospital and these kinds of problems; she said back then that never happened because everything was done exactly to the letter of the law. And she said especially in training—you could get out of training if you didn't do exactly the way they were taught to do. And she said today shouldn't be any problems with that. But because they don't follow procedures like they used to do, and train the people and that, that that's why there are problems today.

DC: So she thinks that the standards have become more lax, or that the practices have . . .

CR: And the training is not what it was back then.

DC: Interesting inversion of progress. People always think of things getting better now.

CR: Right.

DC: Well what about your neighborhood growing up? Where were you? I don't know much about East Cleveland. What was that like?

CR: Well actually I grew up in Euclid, which was a suburb of Cleveland. We grew up, really, in basically a middle class subdivision with—In basically a tract built house. It was built during the war and our schooling was public school education. They were very interested in our bettering our life for education for college because of the fact that they hadn't really had—my Dad hadn't had the opportunities for that. So they were very interested in my brother and I having those kind of opportunities to do that.

DC: When did your family move to Euclid?

CR: They actually, they lived in East Cleveland to begin with. It was in 1942 that they moved. And then that's the only place that I—we only lived there the whole time.

DC: OK, All right. So they moved during the war.

CR: Actually during the war. And an interesting story for that: they moved supposedly *way* out in the country. There were no stores, there were very few houses. And of course at that time, no one had telephones. And an uncle of mine who worked for Ohio Bell telephone company said, "You're living out so far, you oughtta have a telephone." But they were not putting in phones. So he said, "I will talk to some people and you will get a phone, but if people ask you how come you got a phone, you don't know how come you got a phone.

But please, because you'll be the only one in the area with a phone, you know, let everybody use the phone." So one day the telephone people came out and my parents got a telephone and of course everybody wanted to know how they got a phone. Well, they just got a phone. But now, of course, where they are is practically city now. But at that time it was way out in the country.

DC: Then another question that occurred to me; you said your family is of Czech background. When did your ancestors come to the United States and where did they settle?

CR: They actually came from Bohemia part of Czechoslovakia. And back generations, they were furniture makers on both sides. And of course, East Cleveland had kind of a Czech background community; and that's how my Mom and Dad met. And a lot of the relatives then married people of that background. And some of them actually, a grandmother, grandfather on one side, I think was actually born in the Czech Republic. But the others were actually born in the Cleveland area.

DC: And so were both of your parents born in the Cleveland area?

CR: Right. Right.

DC: OK. All right. So your family had been rooted there for some time at least.

CR: That's correct.

DC: OK. But there was a Czech or Bohemian community.

CR: Right. And a little bit, [to Tom] and that's why I guess I was kind of attracted to you, for the Czech background all we had was pork, sauerkraut, and dumplings were our background. So in marrying him with the Dutch background with [?] things, there was a lot more heritage directly, where ours kind of got lost even in a short time.

DC: OK. So it sounds like your family didn't really play up its Czech or Bohemian heritage.

CR: Right.

DC: OK. What was your sense for why that was?

CR: He actually knows more about his background. I actually know more about his background than I really know about my parents' background. They—they just never discussed much about it for who knows what reason. I really don't know that. I wish I knew more, quite frankly. And I have a cousin whose son actually just returned from the Czech Republic, going back to some family homes that have stayed in the family and we're trying to sort of make all those connections now with pictures and this sort of thing. So we're working on that, but a lot—and that's why writing oral histories is so important because you lose it when the generations are gone.

DC: Yeah, I have no idea if it applies in your case, but I know that in many cases the first generation clings to the traditions [more?] than the second and successive generations who keep hearing the old stories. You know how it is, they roll their eyes and—I don't know if that matches with your family's experience or not, but it does kind of fit a pattern that I've heard of.

CR: It might. We have tried to teach our boys the family background of his family and for as much of we know of ours, so some of that won't be lost. We have started to label photographs and all of that sort of thing. And even current photographs where we know, of course, it's us, because three generations down the road they'll look at us and say, "Who are they?"

DC: You're right about that. And that's—when I was young enough, or when my grandparents were alive and I could've spoken with them like this, I didn't. Sometimes we don't become wise enough to realize we want to do this until we're older.

CR: I only had one grandmother alive, also, and she died when I was eleven. So that may be part of that. I never knew grandfathers and I never knew my other grandmother. So that plays a factor for it. I do have two oil paintings of my great-grandparents on my mother's side that I got from a cousin of my mother's. So we're working on that.

DC: That's great that you're assembling all that. Yeah. An oil portrait, that must've been quite a step to have someone do that.

CR: Well, we didn't do that. It was my mother's cousin who had them. And he's now elderly and not well. And he called and asked me if I wanted them and I said, "Oh, I'd love to have them!" Well it took, because a friend of his had it in the garage and it took awhile, but they're, like, this big and we have them hanging now. And from my great-grandmother, I had never seen a picture of her. My great-grandfather, I had pictures, older pictures. But these were painted from photographs that my mother's cousin had. And they were young, you know, when they were young. So that was fascinating for us.

DC: Sure. Well that's good that you can assemble all these and try to bring some order to it. That's really wise. I'm trying to maybe switch gears back now; when you came back from Indonesia you would've been only, what, five years old.

TR: Right.

DC: I don't know if you can remember anything at all from that far back.

CR: You can!

TR: Actually, I can.

DC: You can, OK. Well I was wondering what it was like for you, I mean, because . . .

TR: Because I—like I went to preschool and kindergarten when I was in Indonesia. And I remember, you know, going there in like an army truck. [laughs] Well, actually a navy truck, I guess it was. And that was how we went back and forth to school, because everything was run by the Dutch navy over there.

CR: I want to just interrupt for just one question I should've asked, because I'm realizing this is so beneficial. We're going to get a copy of this tape?

DC: Yeah, I'll be happy to make you a copy of the tape. Absolutely.

CR: OK.

DC: Anyone who wants a copy of the tape gets it.

CR: OK. Otherwise we have to have a tape recorder—we should have a tape recorder.

DC: No, I can run off a copy very quickly, so I can get that right back to you. I can do the copies a lot faster than I can do the transcribing.

CR: Oh, we'd love to have a copy.

TR: Oh we'd love that.

CR: You could also tell him one other thing you remember is the [?].

TR: Yeah, we had—of course, that was another nice thing about living in Indonesia: they had the babos [sp?], which is basically servants who did, you know, all the cooking, the washing, the stuff like that, which was very nice for my mother and was very nice for us. You know, of course we were all little kids. Those people, you know, they give you baths, they give—and, you know, the one thing is hard to believe for me now even, because I could speak the Indonesian language there while I was a little kid. And, you know, we taught those babos the Dutch songs and they taught us Indonesian songs, you know. And so that was really nice. And I even remember as a kid, we had a big—because they have monsoon seasons over there, and we had a big ditch along the house and I fell into that one time, completely. I even remember that.

DC: Could you swim?

TR: No, I couldn't swim. But I got out, of course. You know, for refrigeration we didn't have that—we had the big box of ice that they delivered every day. And I remember them—used to deliver that on the island. And we had like a little stone fence around, in the—where the driveway there, on both sides, and that's where they delivered those, right on top of that. Then the babo had to haul those in. [laughs]

DC: Haul the ice in, OK. So then what was it like returning to the Netherlands? What do you remember about that?

TR: I remember . . .

CR: Tell him about the ship and how everyone was ill.

TR: Yeah. My mother had malaria while she was there and of course that is a very common illness over there. And so she had to go, when we went back—fact, she spent much of her time in the hospital over in Indonesia, much of this time. So she had to go back on the hospital ship and when they had to go back, and so—and they would not allow us kids with her on the ship, so even though my dad was in shipping transport he could not finagle even that. So she went back on a different ship than we did. And I remember that we went from . . .

CR: Because his Dad still . . .

TR: [?]

CR: They had to go by themselves!

TR: So we had to go by ourselves with the three and a little baby, too, because he was less than a year old.

DC: So who was looking after the baby?

TR: Well, they had some people who were supposed to, but they never did. So actually it was my older brother that was looking after all of us at the time.

CR: And he was . . .

DC: About ten years old maybe.

TR: He was—well this was in ‘50, yeah in ‘50. So he was ten years old. He was born in ‘40, so.

CR: And Paul cried the whole way back. And ate bananas.

TR: He cried the whole way. That was a four week trip. So through the Suez Canal and everything and . . .

CR: He ate only bananas and he was so—he had lost so much weight in those four weeks, your mother said when you got back, she didn’t even recognize him. He looked so bad.

TR: We looked so bad, yeah.

DC: Who got back first, your mother or you?

TR: My mother got back first, and then we came back. And then we lived with my grandmother for the year until my Dad came back.

DC: OK. And where was your mother at that point? Was she healthy enough to be with you?

CR: Oh yeah.

TR: Yeah. When she came back to Holland, she was fine. Her malaria was over with and she was OK then. But she was as thin as a rail when she was there because of all the weight she lost.

DC: So then you came back and you said you lived with your grandparents?

TR: Yeah, we lived with my mother's parents. Actually her step-parents.

DC: OK. Was that back in Amsterdam?

TR: That was back in Amsterdam, right.

DC: And what do you remember about life in Amsterdam in the early '50's?

TR: Well, from there, you know, [?] and we lived across the harbor in Amsterdam. They had to just [?] part of Amsterdam [??]. And later we went to live in the south of Amsterdam and we lived there for quite a few years then. But that's where I went to school and stuff; we skated in the canals in the wintertime . . .

CR: I've always wanted to be in Amsterdam when it's cold enough to skate in the city like that rather than in a rink.

DC: Yeah, sounds exciting.

CR: You rode your bicycle, too. I mean, they didn't have cars.

TR: We rode the bicycle, you know, and even though I was little I went all over Amsterdam on the bicycle and stuff, which was pretty safe and everything at the time.

DC: What were your schools like?

TR: I went to a Catholic school, in fact, first. I went to [?] to kindergarten for a year, or part of the year I guess—went to kindergarten. And then I, later on—this was a Catholic one, then I went to Catholic school for two years. The first and second [?], there was only part of a second grade. And then since—I guess I gotta backtrack here, because after—you know, I was born right after the war, just a few days. The war ended on May 5 and actually in Amsterdam it was May 7, really, when it ended. And I was born on the 13th of May. And since there was no food and no nutrition for mothers who were pregnant and all of that, so I as a baby I suffered from that.

CR: You were very sickly.

TR: And I was very sickly and very skinny and everything, which I was for a long time. So in fact, the doctor told my Dad that I needed chocolate, you know, to get [?]. My Dad tried to get chocolate. Well, all he—when he finally bought, he spent a week's pay to buy a little bit of chocolate, and it turned out . . .

CR: Powder.

TR: The chocolate powder. And it turned out to be ground shells—had nothing in it. So that did absolutely nothing, you know. So but I made it. Then after the second grade and I was still skinny [?] and so the Dutch government send me to a special—like a school type of thing, but there was no education involved except—like a camp. Like a weight gain camp.

DC: Weight gain camp. OK, so you were singled out . . .

CR: Yeah, throughout Holland.

TR: Yeah, from throughout Holland they were over it. I mean, there were probably a thousand kids there, so—so I was part of that. And I had to go for six weeks. To basically gain weight, get good food and all of that stuff.

CR: But they said basically you just hiked in the woods. You picked being out in the camp in the woods and all they did was hike.

TR: Yeah, there were two. There were two sets of camps. The one was in the woods and the other one was near the ocean, near the North Sea. And for some reason, you know, I had my choice I guess, and I chose the woods. I was afraid of water at the time, but I did it. So I had [?] to go swimming in the sea and not coming back, so I said, "Oh, the woods." But that was kind of disaster, I guess. After six weeks I had gained no weight at all. So they held me over and said, "You gotta go for another six weeks."

CR: Away from your parents.

TR: I was away from my family . . .

DC: Was this during the school year?

CR: During his second grade year he missed twelve weeks of school.

TR: So I missed three months of school and that because after that, and I guess I only weighed two pounds, gained two pounds in the twelve weeks finally. And so well then I went back to school and of course having missed all that time, I couldn't keep up with it. And so in the end of the school they were going to keep me, you know, have me repeat the year. And I balked at that, my parents balked at that, and so they sent me to a different school then

and still went to third grade, but of course that really wasn't the best thing for me. Anyway, eventually but I did go on, but I always struggled through school because of that.

CR: The logic behind that is unbelievable. I don't know how you justify that.

TR: The logic was very bad. And I guess it happened to my Dad, too. He said, you know, he was in one of those camps when he was a kid. You know, so I guess, hopefully they don't have those anymore because, you know, it really was disastrous as far as that went.

DC: What kind of job did your father have then? Were you hurting for money? Could you provide food for the kids at that point in time?

TR: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Because at that time my Dad was working as shipbuilding and he was making good money while he was there. So he had no problem, you know, doing that.

CR: It was only really earlier during the war years, and especially the last year. Because the southern part of Holland had been liberated, but not Amsterdam. And that last winter had been very hard. They didn't have food. They were eating—they made coffee out of tulip bulbs and this sort of thing to survive. They were also taking inside doors to burn for fuel because it was cold and there was no fuel. It was very bad, that last winter.

TR: See, at the beginning of World War II Holland had seven-year supply of food, actually, in storage. And of course the Germans found out about that, so that all went to Germany. And the last winter is what they call the hunger winter and of course all the food was gone. It took all of the [?] people in Holland, they just had to survive on what they could find.

CR: They had taken blankets, they took radios, they took everything and you said on the trains with all of this stuff to Germany. They had signs, "Love gifts from the Dutch".

TR: From the Dutch, yeah. Right.

CR: So people had to really—it was hard to even survive those last couple of years.

TR: A lot of people died during that last year because of that.

CR: They had friends, too, that had Jews in the house during the war for a couple of years. And your mother did help people when—because sometimes they would come to round up men to send to Germany. And your mother actually invited some people in the house to protect them because they knew they were coming around, and then when it was safe she let them go out the back door.

DC: That sounds quite risky.

TR: Yeah. Yeah, it was.

DC: And your father wasn't there, right?

TR: My father wasn't there, that's right.

DC: Did you have a special place in your house where people could hide?

TR: Not in our house, no, the one that we had. But, you know, some houses, the older houses, they did. But my mother would just keep them in the house and hopefully that nobody would just walk into the house. Because since they were at a place where I guess the train station was close by. So they rounded up a lot of people always there. And so whenever my mother could, you know, "Come on in here and, you know, out the back door you go," you know. And so that's—she's done that on occasions.

CR: We have friends that the lady worked for a dentist. And he and his wife were Jewish faith. And when they start rounding up Jews, she said to him, "What are you going to do?" And they said, "We don't know." And she said, "Well, you're going to come stay with us." And they had an upstairs room through a bookcase. And it was, like, two and a half years these people stayed up there and got extra food through the underground. And they had a son at the time and they put a hook on his door and told him that he would sleepwalk at night. And so they put the hook on the door because he never knew that this couple lived upstairs all this time. They would come down at night and only her mother knew about this couple. But one time this lady got sick so they had to get a doctor. And so he knew about it. But they actually made it through the war and they were all safe because, of course, these friends of ours would've been killed if they would've found them upstairs. But the son never knew that these two people lived upstairs. And one time he actually hid up there, the husband of our friends, because they were rounding up people. So he went up with them. So it was really kind of tough going for the Dutch with the Germans.

TR: Like the story of Anne Frank is one famous story, but there were a lot of them like that, that were hiding up there. She was one of them.

DC: Right, she just happened to write the diary. But it sounds like your father might've ended up in Germany one way or another. If not in the first round for metal workers but later.

TR: Right.

DC: I've talked about the quirky ways by which people got to the Pontiac area. Here's one of them. This is . . .

TR: That's so true.

DC: Well let's see now. I'm trying to—this is so out of the ordinary here, we're talking about. I'm trying to get myself focused. But what about, let's see, when you were a teenager. OK, now this would've been, well I guess in the late '50's.

TR: Late '50's.

CR: You can really tell him about your first job because the school situation in the appliance . . .

DC: That's where I was heading.

TR: See, when I was fifteen, of course, then the school situation really was getting bad and so . . .

DC: What was bad?

CR: You went to technical school.

TR: I went to technical school.

CR: But again, you were behind.

TR: I wanted to learn to be electrician. That was what I wanted to be.

DC: How did you know that you wanted to be an electrician?

CR: You liked to put things together and take things apart.

TR: Yeah, I liked to put things together and I . . .

CR: And you were good at it.

TR: Yeah, I had built like a model radio before that I just bought from a kit and stuff like that, and I had done that kind of stuff. And so that's really what I wanted to do, so I went to a technical school. And I went there for a year and a half, but I could do the technical stuff but when it came to all the math and the algebra, the stuff like that, you know, I had very serious problems with that. So the director of school called my parents and, you know, said, well they had to find something else for me because it wasn't gonna work out. So I had an uncle who was [?], again this is because of the World War II, he was a butcher and people in the food business always had food to eat and during the hunger winter they still had food and you know. And so they didn't share that with any family members but they did. So, you know, my mother said it's always good to be in the food business, you ought to go get a job in the butcher shop. So she looked in the paper, found an advertisement, and so I started working at the butcher shop.

CR: At first, before you did that, you worked in that small appliance repairing . . .

TR: Oh yeah. Yeah, OK. Yeah, you're right. I guess you gotta back up a year or a few months really.

CR: See, I've heard a lot of the stories and so.

DC: You're prompt, that's right.

TR: Yeah, so right after that . . .

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

TR: . . . yeah, it's all together, you know. So right after Christmastime and after they talked to the [?] school, I got a job to repair irons, toasters, and stuff like that. And so I did that for seven months.

CR: You got paid how much, do you remember?

TR: I got paid eighteen guilders a week. [laughs]

DC: Which would . . .

TR: Which, at that—well, I guess you could call it eighteen dollars at that time. At that time a guilder was—a dollar was like three and a half guilders. So it wasn't a whole lot.

CR: No benefits.

TR: And of course, no benefits.

DC: How about the experience, was it worth it?

TR: Oh yeah, the experience was definitely worth it. And if I had repaired more than ten irons in the day, then I got a guilder extra for each one that you did. So we—it didn't happen all the time, but once in awhile we got more than, you know, than the ten, so I got a little extra money out of it.

DC: Now did they have to teach you how to repair these irons, or could you figure it out?

TR: Yeah they—no, they taught us how to repair it and stuff, which wasn't that hard, really. You just put the, you know, the new parts in it and some you had to just repair. But other ones you just took the old parts out, put new parts in, and put it all back together. So that worked out pretty good.

CR: And you were always doing that.

TR: Yeah. And in fact there was a [?] service and that was an English firm [?] English irons that we—that we built. So I did that for about seven months, and that is when my mother said, "You know, it's about time to move on and you should go to—in the butcher shop." And so they found an advertisement.

DC: And was her thinking still rooted in the war?

TR: Her thinking was still rooted in the war because, you know, I guess everybody still believed that there was gonna be another one. And, you know, they were just done with World War II and of course, you know, we had World War I before, so everybody figured World War III was only the next step, you know. Because Germany was, after all, still there and everything else, so what they had gone through—so she said, "Why don't you go into the butcher shop?" And so I did. And I got a job at—with the butcher and his wife and, in fact, I still write them. I still know them.

CR: You're still in touch with them.

TR: Still in touch with them. And . . .

CR: We even went and visited them. That's after we were married.

TR: Yeah, we went to visit them after we were married. And I still am in touch with their daughter and son-in-law, too.

CR: And it was kind of interesting back then because not only was he trained as a butcher at the butcher shop, but he actually went to school to learn how to be a butcher from the business end, the animal end, the diseases, so it wasn't just like an apprenticeship in a butcher shop. It was a combination because in Holland you actually have to be, and I think today still, you have to get permission from the government to open a butcher shop. You can't just hang up a sign and open a store and meet the clean standards and have a butcher shop. You can't do that.

TR: You have to have a license. You have to have special diploma in order to open your own butcher shop.

CR: And the training.

TR: And the training. That is required by law. So I had, so while I was working I also had to go back to school. And so I did that and, you know, I guess I liked the school and everything that I was going to. And I was there very successful—in fact, I did much better in school then than I did before, and it worked out OK.

DC: And what years would this have been?

TR: This was in 1961 when this happened.

CR: And it's interesting, too, because he delivered meat. Again, in Holland you didn't have the refrigeration so you bought your food for the day. You delivered a lot of food, and of course you delivered by bicycle. And of course, Holland being a wet country, you wore wooden shoes. And so he would deliver his food on the bicycle with his wooden shoes.

TR: Right. Being cold and wet in the butcher shop and especially in the wintertime it was cold and stuff, and the wooden shoes actually keeps your feet warm.

CR: And if your parents hadn't come here, you'd probably today would've owned a butcher shop in Holland.

TR: I probably would've. I would've.

DC: Did you enjoy that?

TR: Yes, I did. Actually I did enjoy that. So I did have a good time while I was there and I did learn a lot.

CR: You did a lot of kind of the learning kinds of things because the butcher went every week and bought a cow. He was not like the main butcher—he did some of the other kinds of things. But of course you got to watch them—how to cut meat. And at that time in Holland, the meat was cut not like here where you take a chunk of meat and you have a saw and you run it through and you get five different kinds of meats. No, they cut each individual so you got a certain kind of meat. I mean, it was much more precise than it even is here today. And because of that experience, after we were married, we would get hind quarters and he would butcher them and I learned how to trim and cut meat because of your experience. And yet you didn't quite get that far in butcher school in Holland.

TR: No. No.

CR: But school generally, even back then, as we understand it is today, is much more intensive in Europe. There's not so much art time, gym time, odds and ends time. I mean, you've got all your lessons. So a year of school in Holland was kind of like a year and a half of school here because you didn't have all the fun time, all the down time. And so that basically was what you were learning from the butcher.

TR: Our summer vacation was only six weeks in Holland, you know, rather than the ten weeks or so, or the three months you always had here, you know?

CR: But then your parents . . .

TR: Then we decided to come to the United States.

DC: Why did your family make that decision? What happened?

TR: Well, it was my mother, really, who wanted to come to the United States. After having lived in Indonesia that time, see, she decided—in fact, it was in 1955 the first time, or probably 1954, when she started to make the plans to come to the United States. And at that time we had . . .

CR: You needed a sponsor.

TR: We needed a sponsor. And they had through the World Council of Churches, they found a place in Ottumwa, Iowa. And this, there was a local church there that was gonna sponsor us and in fact we had a house and everything . . .

CR: Before that you had some other churches that would sponsor you in California, in . . .

TR: Not that time. That was the next time.

CR: Oh, not that—that was later. Oh, OK.

DC: This was in 1954 or '55?

TR: Yeah, this was in—we were actually gonna come here in 1955. But the work started, I guess, already in 1954 because it takes time. You have to go through the consulates, the American consulate in Rotterdam. And when we finally got everything done, then we had to go for the physicals.

CR: But you should tell him, they did have a house that they were going to rent for them. The church was going to pay.

TR: My Dad had a job there.

CR: They had a job for his dad and in Ottumwa, Iowa.

TR: At John Deere.

CR: At John Deere. And everything . . .

DC: Right. Yeah, has to be either farm implements or meat.

TR: He was gonna be [?] welder over at . . .

CR: Everything was kind of set for them to come and the church—the thing that I found very interesting, too—the church was a different denomination for them. And of course letters went back and forth, they had to be translated. And at the time, of course, you were pretty young. So he didn't actually read the letters and all that. But we do have those letters. And the church said—which is amazing to me, the freedoms that we have in this country—they said even though they were going to pay for your transportation from New York to Ottumwa, rent the house, people in the church were donating stoves and everything else for them to start off with. The church said, "If you—we understand you're of a different denomination. If you want to join our church when you come, that would be wonderful. If you want to go to a different church in our city when you come, that is fine, too. If you don't want to go to church at all when you're going to come here, that is still fine." We think that they wanted to build the community and the people in the community, but I say

way back then, the church was not saying, "Well we're gonna help you out, so we expect you to be—you know, you owe us something." No, the church said, "We're gonna help you, we're gonna sponsor you, but you don't have any obligation to us after the fact." And it was written in the letters, and I found that pretty remarkable for the United States to say that.

TR: Yeah.

DC: So was your father interested in coming?

TR: Well, he got talked into it, I guess. He was—[laughs], you know, because he had a good job. He had a job he liked and stuff, and he was making, you know, making good money and . . .

CR: Of course, [?] they lived in an apartment, in a small apartment. And after having been in Indonesia and having a house and hearing the stories—because your parents had never been to the US. And basically, they only knew a little bit of English. You had had a little English in school.

TR: We had some in school.

CR: But they had never been here. Can you imagine planning at that time just to move to an entirely different country permanently?

DC: Well, but they had gone to Indonesia.

TR: But they had gone to Indonesia and that . . .

CR: That had worked out.

TR: That was gonna be OK, you know. So my Dad went along with it and so, you know, we decided to go. So they did all the paperwork and everything. So then on that fateful day . . .

CR: You were kid of all set.

TR: . . . we had to, yeah we had to go to Rotterdam. We were all set except for our medical clearance. And so . . .

CR: Was that the day with the car?

TR: No, that was not that time. [laughs] No. So we, you know, we spent the whole day going through physicals and everything there.

CR: Ellis Island was already closed, so you didn't do that here.

TR: Yeah, that was closed. We didn't go to Ellis Island. We did everything . . .

CR: Over there.

TR: Right. So they did it over there at the consulate. And so, well everybody was OK except for my mother. They found out she had TB and she was not allowed to come.

CR: A slight case of TB.

TR: She had a slight case of TB, but . . .

CR: Now I don't know how you have a slight case, but that . . .

TR: You know, I don't know how you—a slight case.

DC: Slight malaria, slight TB.

TR: Right. So they said, "You cannot come. Your whole family can come, but not you." And, of course, well that's, you know . . .

CR: That was the end of that.

TR: That was the end of that. So, in fact, she went . . .

CR: You had to write to the church and all that.

TR: In 1957, she went in the sanitarium. She spent nine months over there. And all because of so much family troubles. Because we had—all our kids were split up at different people's and, you know . . .

DC: While she was at the sanitarium . . .

TR: Because while she was there in the hospital. And of course, so that wasn't an easy thing. It wasn't easy for my Dad, either.

CR: Your Dad had work, and then he had to go to all these people. And of course you didn't have a car. I mean, he had to ride his bike to visit all the people.

TR: Right. And living with different families, that caused different problems of course, because if your family does things a little different and as kids you don't always understand that stuff. [check this section] "Oh, it's nothing." And finally they took him to the doctor, and you know, he had broken his arm.

DC: So you lived with a different family for nine months or so?

TR: Right. Right. Actually, wasn't quite nine months because they—I didn't like it over there,

I guess, and for whatever kid's reasons, too, you know.

CR: Obvious reasons.

TR: So the last three months, I think, I spent with my Dad's mother. You know, they finally said, "You can't stay any longer." And so I went to my Dad's mother for the last three months. Which was nice because I had a good time there. Because she was a lot friendlier. I was the only one there. That was after I broke my arm, in fact. So then they decided they want to get rid of me.

DC: Were you able to see your mother during this time?

TR: Only once. Only once I seen her.

CR: And after those nine months, they wanted her to stay longer. But she said, "I've gotta get out. We got too many family needs. I can't stay here any longer."

TR: They told her, "You're going to die. You stay." And she said, "I gotta go." So she checked herself out of the hospital at that point and she came home. We all came home and she did get rid of the TB. So she did not die of it, either, like they told her. So then in 1960—well, in the early—about '60, really, we started thinking about, talking about going back to the United States. And well, we had at that point, we knew some other people in Amsterdam who were going. And first we were gonna go to California. But we had to wait for sponsors, of course, because you couldn't get in here unless somebody sponsored you. And well, so that was just a waiting game. Then we knew some people, they went to Oregon and they found a sponsor. Well then it turned out that somebody was going to sponsor us to Pasadena, but they were sponsoring another family first so we would've had to wait five years because the sponsor time is five years till they could sponsor us. So we said, "OK, well we'll wait unless we find something else." So then in 1961, we actually had some—my mother had a cousin over here, living over here, (in fact, three of them). And so they—it was a sister of my grandmother that was living here and then her kids. And one of those cousins was in Amsterdam in 1961 and the question came up, of course, if we wanted to come to the United States and if we were looking for sponsors. Well so she said, "What's wrong with Michigan?" So, well at the time, my dad says, "Well, I don't wanna be sponsored by family members because I don't wanna have to say thank you for the rest of my life for doing that", you know. "Oh, no," she said, "That wasn't necessary. We're not like that," and everything else, and you can come—in fact, she started telling that her husband was a big boss at General Motors and everything else—that they would have no problems and everything else. But still . . .

CR: And that everything was good here. [?] flowed easily, it was the land of the rich.

TR: And everything was good here, everything, you know—don't bring anything with you.

DC: Pick gold apples off the trees.

TR: Yeah, the gold, you know. Everything else. Well it turned out that her husband was laying floors at Truck and Bus in the buses, rather than he was no big boss. [laughs] So we found that out through the paperwork that they had assembly around—they did, in fact, sponsor us.

DC: So they were allowed to sponsor you even though they were immigrants themselves?

TR: They were allowed. Well, they were here since World War II, so they had been here a long time. So they—so yeah, they were allowed to sponsor us then. And so we, you know, because of all the official paperwork they had to send, well we found out a lot of stuff wasn't really true that they had told us.

CR: Also, too, you got to come because, of course, there were quota systems at that time. And if you were on the Dutch quota system, who knows when you would be able to come? But because his younger brother was born in Indonesia, they actually immigrated as Indonesian refugees, because not too many Indonesians at that time wanted to come to this country. And so they were pushed up on the list because of that. And you actually got some help in the transportation and the moving your things over here because of being Indonesian refugees.

TR: Indonesian refugees. So we—right, seeing as my brother was born there. In fact, we had four choices because my—because, of course, most our kids were born in Amsterdam. But my Dad was born in Germany and my mother was born in France, and all of Dutch parents who were just working overseas, or over across the border, really. You know, so because of that we had, you know, we could take whatever was the fastest way. And of course they told us since my brother was born in Indonesia, that is the fastest way to go, as Indonesian refugees. So that is how we came over as refugees. But of course we had to have the sponsor and, well they, so they said, "OK, well [?] can sponsor you. We'll have a job for you here, [??]." And said, "We'll have a job for you and you can start living with us until we find a house and all of that stuff." So when we came here . . .

CR: And everybody passed the physical this time.

TR: Everybody passed the physical. My parents did, too. And this is when we went to Rotterdam with the [?]. We were . . .

CR: Of course they were leery about it. I mean, the first time it had all fallen through.

TR: After the first time we were leery about this time—what's gonna happen this time? Well, we were driving on the freeway in Holland and suddenly the hood flew up on the car and bang! And my Dad couldn't see, we were just passing the big semi and he couldn't see anything. So he had to, you know, back off the semi and get off the side of the road and he had to tie the hood shut on the car. So everybody was already tied in knots over the whole thing, but we finally made it to Rotterdam and we spent much less time, this time, over there. But because of that, well they took blood from me and I passed out.

DC: Not passed but passed out. Passed and passed out.

TR: Right [?]. And, you know, they—somebody else, I think Renee my sister was a little queasy over there, too. But then they, you know, we went through all the exams and they sent us out to go for lunch and come back in a couple hours, which we did. Well, then we found out that we passed. And so we were out to come here. So we came. So we made all the provisions and even though people had told us, you know, don't take anything with you because everything is so cheap here.

CR: Stuff is so cheap you don't need any money.

TR: Well, we were allowed to take two thousand pounds a person.

DC: Weight?

TR: Weight to take along with us. So that is two thousand? Two hundred? Well we had a ton, yeah a little over a ton. We had a big, you know, a big crate about the size of a bathroom.

CR: Because his dad had learned in Indonesia when people came over and you had suitcases, they threw them. If you have a big crate, it gets lifted off with the crane. So your stuff is . . .

TR: Or small wooden boxes or whatever, you know. Put everything in one big thing and they said that it takes a crane to load it on the ship and nobody's going to bang that around. And because, you know, they have seen stuff that came from Holland to Indonesia that is all ruined, of course. But since he was in the shipbuilding, so he said, "Everything's gotta go in one crate." And we still had seventeen pieces of luggage, because altogether we were six of us, you know. But we brought the big crate along, which weighed over a ton. And we had it, and so we came with that in New York with most of our possessions that we had.

CR: And that thing was packed!

TR: This table came out of that. And these chairs, my dad made those, in fact, in Holland still.

CR: Furniture, beds . . .

TR: So all of that we . . .

CR: [?], windmills, silverware, dishes.

TR: You know, we brought just about everything along. Yeah. So, of course we came to that at customs in New York and you know how customs are. So we came there and we were looking at the people in front of us and they had, you know, a bunch of suitcases they had to open everything. They took everything out of the suitcases. We were standing there watching and said, "Uh-oh, what's gonna happen?" You know. The customs guy came to

us and he said, "How many people are you? This is how many suitcases? OK." He looked at it, he said OK. He said, "That's fine." He said, "Now I know you had a big crate over here." So he took me with my Dad and he said . . .

CR: Of course, there's not too much English now.

TR: Yeah, you know, my Dad conversed in German with him because he knew a little German and so my Dad knew a little German, and so they kind of conversed in German to each other. So and the guy, he calls a worker over there and with the hammer and he said something to that guy with the hammer and banged on the side of that big crate. And then the customs said, "OK, that's enough." He said, "Now it looks like it's been opened up." He said, "You're All right to go."

DC: Oh, because of having checked it at the other end.

TR: Right.

CR: Well because it was, you know, looks like it had been banged up.

TR: So it looked like it had been opened. So we never had to open anything on our way in, and unbelievable. And so that was so nice, especially watching these people in front of us that had to open everything. And so he said, "You can go ahead and go."

CR: You should say, too, when you were on the ship you were having breakfast when they passed the Statue of Liberty. And they told them, "We're passing the Statue of Liberty." Now you have to remember, they've never been in this country. Spoke very little English. You said you got up from breakfast to go out on deck to look at the Statue of Liberty.

TR: Oh yeah. Of course everybody jumped up and . . .

CR: And went out to look at the Statue of Liberty.

TR: . . . went up and saw the Statue of Liberty.

CR: And what is our country gonna be like? I mean, you said you were queasy when you landed. You spent a day in . . .

TR: We spent the day in New York.

CR: New York. They stayed basically in the bus station waiting.

TR: In the train station.

CR: Or in the train station, waiting. But wondering what's, you know. And the fact that they had taken a ship across, like you said at the time you thought, "I'll never go back. I'll never be able to." Of course, flying and that was not what it is today. "That I may never

go back. I mean, I'm here to stay. Like it or whatever, this is my new home permanently."

TR: So we left. Because we had tickets for the train at 6:00 that evening. So we milled around to the train station most of the day because we had really no money. My Dad had—how much money did he have?

CR: $82.00.

TR: $82.00 in his pocket and that was it.

CR: Four kids.

TR: And us kids, we had no money at all. So that was all the money we had.

DC: So that was all you had . . .

CR: And your possessions. That was it.

TR: And the possessions. That was it, you know.
CR: I really call them modern day immigrants is what I call them.

TR: But our way was paid for, all the way to Pontiac, you know, or to Detroit really. Into the train station.

DC: But that was your family's life savings and possessions.

TR: But that was it. You know, because we had to pay, of course, a lot of taxes on that money before we left Holland. And so, but then the government helped pay our trip here.

CR: And the crate.

TR: Yeah, and the crate, too. So we arrived in Detroit on the next morning and our relatives here, they came and picked us up, the sponsors, and also his sister was also here, so they came with two cars. And they picked us up [?] because we had all that luggage with us. And so we came to Pontiac then and, well . . .

CR: Then the crate came on a semi.

TR: Then the crate came, of course, on a semi. And we had them deliver that to Auburn Heights where the other relatives lived because he had a big garage because he had a milk route here in Detroit, or in Auburn Heights there. And so he had a big garage to put it in, you know. Because we had no place to put it yet because we didn't have a house, of course.

CR: So it arrives on a semi at their house.

TR: But it arrives on a semi at their house and the guy said, "Here it is!". [laughs] "Get it off the truck!"

CR: You get it off the truck. I mean there was—you didn't have any provisions to take this crate, to take it off.

DC: Yeah, no crane to take it. So it had just been loaded right from the ship onto the semi.

TR: Yeah, they just unload it from the ship. And the fact that, you know, because it took a few weeks before it actually came over here, you know. But so here it is. Well, luckily there was a church lumberyard on the corner of the road, which was about a quarter mile away from where they lived. So my uncle went over there and so they borrowed a forklift truck and they came with that over there from them, which was nice they let them have it. And so they, so we had to push it because the truck was way up high. So the fork truck couldn't get to that crate because that crate was [?]. So we had to push with all of us, to the end of the truck, the trailer. And so then they took it down with the fork truck.

CR: I wish I'd been there for that.

TR: But he had a gravel driveway and so they couldn't—the fork truck and that heavy crate couldn't make it across. So they had to roll it from there all the way into the garage, and the garage was on the end of the driveway. And through the back of the garage, too. So that took quite some doing to get it in there. But we got it in there.

CR: But then your Dad, OK, your Dad needed a job.

TR: Then of course my Dad needed a job and, well, our sponsors did not have a job for him. So it is my uncle that had the milk route, and he delivered milk at Superior Metal in Auburn Heights on Auburn Road. And so he went in one time. In fact, I was with him because, since I had no money, either, he said, "Well, why don't you come on the milk route with me? You can help me, you know." And so, which I did and, you know, he did it basically. He didn't need any help. But he did it just basically so we'd have some money in our pocket.

CR: But he gave you a little bit for it.

TR: Which was a really nice thing. So he walked in there and he went to the superintendent and he talked to him, and the next thing he came out and said, "I got your Dad a job." So when we got home . . .

CR: But it was working on . . .

TR: It was tool and die. He had to work on the dies, to fix dies.

CR: He had never done that before.

TR: And he had never done that before.

DC: So how could he get a job?

CR: Well, he just kind of acted like, AWell, ok I'll do this and I'll learn on the job."

TR: Right, you know, I guess my uncle told him that he's never worked with it but he will know what to do. He will do it. And so he took a chance on him. And my dad worked there for two years. He learned what to do and they were very pleased with him.

CR: But he was very worried there; if he got sick or he got hurt because there were no benefits. And, you know, he had four kids and a family and not a whole lot of background. So that was a constant concern for your dad, of what he would do if something happened. And in the meantime, then, you went from the milk route to . . .what was your first job?

TR: My first job was at Pierre's Floral here where a friend of ours of the family, he was an American but he came around . . .I don't know how they got to know him. But he was [?]. He knew everybody, I guess, and so he said, AWell I'll get you a job at Pierre's Floral." But that was just for the holi . . .for Mother's Day and for, actually for Easter first and then Mother's Day. And so I worked there for a little while. And then I got another Dutch person . . .Because there was quite a few Dutch people that were around here. So through other friends, they said, AWell since you got a butcher background, I'll get you a job at [?] in Pontiac." And they said, AI'll talk to the manager up there." So, well, I wasn't quite eighteen yet and I really could not work as a butcher. But since I had the background they said, AWell, you know, our butchers go on vacation and so you can work here for awhile, while they're gone." And so I did. And I worked out of there for several weeks during that summer. So that was real nice. And they just hired me as a clerk, you know, but I was working in the butcher shop cutting meat and stuff like that. So that worked out OK.

DC: How did you think your skills measured up against the butchers here?

TR: My skills measured up pretty good, you know. They were doing things different here, much different, really. You know, some of the stuff they got in frozen and they just went through the saw, the bandsaw, and they cut it all up and stuff like that.

DC: So not the fine tune . . .

TR: So it wasn't the fine tune that we did in Holland, you know, really.

DC: What did you think of that method?

TR: Well, I thought it wasn't very good because of the fact that, you know, because I had learned this is this kind of meat, that's that kind of meat. And here, we're cutting the stuff all up together, and we really have three different cuts of meat to get, you know, actually. Which would take different temperatures to coOK, you know.

CR: I learned that when we got married when I would ask him about a piece of meat. And he said, AWell, this is the tender part, this is the tougher part, but it's all together because they ran it through the saw."

TR: So, but I enjoyed it. But then when the vacations were over, then my job was over, so I needed another . . .something else. And my oldest brother was . . .and I don't know how he got the job, but he got hired in at Greenfield's Restaurant in Birmingham. So and he had worked there for, you know, a month or so.

DC: What was he doing there?

TR: As a busboy. And so he said, AI'll talk to them." So he talked to them and so they hired me in there, too.

CR: How much did you make then?
TR: Eighty-five cents an hour.

CR: And you actually had to belong to a union then. You had to pay part of your wages for union dues.

DC: What union was that?

TR: Well that was, like, the hotel restaurant union.

CR: But you didn't get any benefits from that.

TR: Yeah, I didn't get any benefits. In fact, when minimum wage was $1.07 and I was only making .85 cents an hour. And I still don't know how they could get away with that.

DC: Were they supposed to share tips with you?

TR: No.

DC: No, that wasn't part of it.

TR: No, I got no tips, no nothing.

DC: So you were sub-minimum wage with a union.

TR: Sub-minimum, even with a union, yeah. Sub-minimum wage.

CR: But you had to pay the dues for that.

TR: But I had the dues. So I didn't, to tell you the truth, I didn't think too much of that union at the time.

DC: Now had you any experiences at all with unions back in the Netherlands?

TR: No, I had never worked in the union. My dad was always in the union.

CR: And the unions in Holland are different. Very different.

DC: Tell me about the unions in Holland that your father was in.

TR: Well, I really don't know too much about the union because from what he says, you know, see they don't have unions like you have here, like the UAW and Teamsters, whatever. You know, they have a whole thing. Here, in Holland, they have like the Catholic union, they have a Protestant union, they got different religious kind of type of unions, and you could . . .you can have one shop and yet the person next to you belongs to a different union than you actually do. And so they have . . .and yet the wages and everything is still government regulated.

DC: So there's less for the unions to do because of the . . .yeah.

TR: So the unions don't have that type of power that they have here.

CR: They don't . . .the purposes of the union to support the workers and provide for the workers and have good wages and this sort of thing, really wasn't necessary in Holland. Because the government made sure that that was all taken care of.

DC: Can you think of any negotiations or . . .

CR: Whether they do that now or not . . .well I don't even think they really negotiated. They just set it up.

TR: Yeah, set the wages. So the unions only take care of grievances that you might have with a coworker or with a boss or something like this. The union will step into that kind of stuff. But wages and stuff, they have nothing to do with that. And even safety, well I guess at that time nobody was too concerned about safety at that time, actually. Not even here, really, so . . . This all changed, of course, at this point and I'm sure it has changed there, too.

CR: But at that time, too, when you worked in one job, you went to another job, you got an official evaluation kind of situation of why you were leaving, what kind of a worker you were . . .your dad had a whole set of every place he worked, and here you get evaluations but sometimes they're private, sometimes you don't see them. This was all kind of public record that they gave you copies. So when your dad came here (and this is kind of important for Pontiac Motors), you had all this record, kind of official record, of all your work experience, how good of a worker you were.

DC: Did he give that to the people at Pontiac Motor?

CR: Well, we'll get to that.

DC: We'll get to that, OK. Well we have a lot of stuff going on here, but I guess a couple of the angles I was trying to finish exploring before we get to this next stage would be whether or not you and/or your father had any feelings based on these experiences in the Netherlands? You mentioned right away that you didn't think too much of this hotel and restaurant workers union because, you know, here you are .85 cents an hour, sub-minimum wage and all this. But was that based just solely on that experience or was it also in relation to . . .

TR: No, solely on this trade. Because I never had experience with any union before myself, so I really didn't know.

DC: But did your father have any feelings about the union he belonged to in the Netherlands?

TR: No. No, he really didn't.

CR: I think it was so different that it wasn't . . .and you have to remember, with that union, I mean, he was just a young, I mean he was still a teenager. It was kind of a part time job and so the union, you paid dues, but it was way over there.

TR: I knew it was just a temporary job, so it didn't make a whole lot of difference, you know.

CR: But out of .85 cents, you know, if you had to pay fifteen cents an hour for the union . . .and I'm not even getting minimum wage for it, what's the purpose of this whole thing? From a teenager's point of view.

TR: But I did a good job for them, and I was hired full time and, in fact, they had different types of jobs that people did, you know. And there was one certain job that I said, AHey, I'd like that. I like the hours and everything else." And at one point in time I told my manager there, Because this was after my brother had left . . .in fact, he had a nice job that I wanted to have. And they had put somebody else on that job. And, but that guy was struggling with the job. He wasn't, you know, and he really wasn't getting ready on time and a lot of that. So I told my . . .well, in fact, I got called in to [?] because one of the assistant managers one time, you know, and that was right after the lunch thing. It was very busy every day and, you know, I was exhausted and I was starting to take a little breather. And he came out there and said, AOh, I want you to wash these walls in the kitchen", and all at that time. And I got unglued there, and I told him a few things. So he sent me to the main manager over there and, you know, that main manager he likes what I . . .. the job that I did. And also what my brother had done.

CR: You were a hard worker.

TR: I was a hard worker. And so we had a little chat with him and I told him, I said, you know, after we got through talking about that . . .and nothing ever came of that because he knew I was doing a good job and said, you know, ok don't worry about it. And so I told him at

that time, I said, AIf you ever need somebody to do that job that my brother did", and I seen the [?] and stuff like that in the morning; I said, AI would like to have that job." He said, AWould you like to start that tomorrow?" I said, AI sure do." And, in fact, he went over and he fired the guy that was doing this thing. And I started the next day doing that job and I did that until, you know, until I quit, which was thirteen months later after I got hired.

CR: Then you went to . . .

TR: Then I . . .then I got a job, I went to Deffon [sp?] Gables in . . .

DC: What was that called?
TR: Deffon Gables.

CR: Didn't you go to the Kingswood School first?

TR: No. Deffon Gables came first. And that was in a restaurant on Telegraph. I don't think it's there anymore. Telegraph and Long Lake Road, there was Deffon Gables. And it was a fancy restaurant. And I went there and applied for, as for a coOK. They needed cooks. I said OK, Because they were offering more money than what I was making. So I said, AOK."

CR: I can learn to be a coOK.

TR: I can learn to be a coOK, you know.

CR: And [?] could learn to do anything that was necessary . . .

TR: And I had also applied at Kingswood Schools as a . . .to work in the storeroom out there in . . .

CR: Supplies.

TR: So but I got hired in as the cook at Deffon Gables, so I started there in the morning. Well, I was doing everything but cooking over there that day, and I wasn't too pleased with that because I was doing other things that I didn't particularly want to do. And I figured as a coOK, well I can stand in there and grill meat or whatever. So I had to do all the other things.

DC: What were the other things you had to do?

TR: Well, carry boxes, you know, all kinds of odd jobs. So when I came home, there was . . .my mother said that I got a call from Kingswood School, they wanted to hire you but I told them you were already working at Deffon Gables. I said, AOhhh!" So I said I didn't like what I did today and so I looked in the phone book and I called Kingswood School and the other person was still there. I said, AAre you still offering that job?" She said yes. I said,

AI'll start tomorrow." And I called Deffon Gables and said, AI'm not coming back." So I worked at Kingswood School for that . . .for the one school season then.

DC: So you worked all of what, one day at the restaurant?

TR: Just one day at that restaurant. [laughs]

DC: We'll get to Kingswood in just a second, but I'm curious to know where your family was living at that point in time. The last we left, you had gotten the forklift and had gotten the crate off the truck, but where did you live?

TR: OK, yeah. Well, OK, we'll go back to that. That's an interesting story.

CR: That's kind of an interesting story.

DC: Yeah but we're at different strands here we're trying to keep track of.

TR: Yeah, back to that one. OK.

CR: I'm not sure how much you wanna just hear about work and labor and this . . .

DC: It's all related, you know?

TR: It kind of is all related.

DC: One of the things that I've learned in talking to people is that the people I talk to are very different from the workers that I see in the history books. Because the workers that I see in the history books are all those one or two dimensional people. You know, they go to work and they go home; and we never get a sense about all the different things that are going on in their lives.

TR: Right. And how they got there.

DC: Exactly. Because, you know, when I think of auto workers; well before I started doing this I thought, AWell, they're people who just went to work when they were eighteen in an auto plant, and they came out at age sixty or something." But, you know, people have all these different experiences and some people have been laid off for eight years or went in the service or this or that. And so hearing about these experiences helps me understand more, I think it will, at least, about what in the world you encountered when you finally were in Local 653.

TR: Right.

CR: By the time we get there, you may need to come back another day.

DC: Well that's ok with me.

CR: I don't know how long you want to stay.

DC: Well, I . . .

CR: I just wanted to [?] that's ok with you.

DC: No, I understand. It's ok with me, as long as you're willing to have me and to spend time, I'm willing to listen. But we may have to break it up, you're right. But anyways, where were we? I think I was asking you about where your family was living at that point.

TR: OK. Yeah. OK, well we were . . .so we came with this family, you know, we stayed with them for awhile when we came to the United States. The ones that sponsored us. Well . . .so and they were just doing nothing. I mean, they expected . . .since my dad now had a job they wanted my dad to pay certain amounts of money to them, for food . . .

DC: And that's exactly what he did not want, right?

TR: Right.

CR: Well it was also arranged that it was OK.

TR: But my other uncle, the one who got him a job, the milkman, he went and he said, AWe're gonna give you food every week to compensate for them", while we were there to help them out. So they were bringing in these boxes of food and, well, then . . .in the conversation, my mother was telling him that they were charging them X amount of dollars, I don't know how much it was.

CR: For food.

TR: For food and everything else. And they said, AHey, they're not supposed to do that because we're bringing the food and you're supposed to be able to get on your feet to make some money so that you can live on your own."

CR: That sort of stopped then.

TR: So they didn't like that and so one day my uncle came over to my parents, he said, ACome on in the car and we're gonna go for a ride." And so they went into Pontiac and so they found a house on East Beverly, which is now Pontiac Motor parking lot, [?] to it. But, you know, he said, AHere's a house."

End of Side B, Tape I

Beginning of Side A, Tape II

DC: . . .so then you thought it was a nice house?

TR: So they thought it was a nice house and so my uncle says, you know, well my dad says, AWell we're not gonna get the ten . . .thousand . . .or at least the down payment." They wanted ten percent down. My uncle said, AI'll take care of that." And he said, AI'll loan you the money, you can pay me back." So my uncle paid the thousand dollars and [?] contract. And so the next thing we knew, we were moving into that house. So we got away from the people who were our sponsors and they were not very happy with that. But we . . .

CR: But it worked out well.

TR: It worked out very well. And we lived there for about a year, a little over a year, I think. And then we found a house on Maplecrest in Waterford Township.

CR: Wait a minute; but that comes later. That comes a little later, doesn't it? Your dad was already working at Pontiac Motors, wasn't he? Or not?

TR: Um, no. No. He wasn't working at Pontiac Motors at that time. No, because he was still working at Superior Metal when we moved to Maplecrest. Yeah. And Fred Stonehouse helped us move Because we didn't have that much stuff to move. So we . . .

CR: To Maplecrest. And Maplecrest was a nice house in Waterford.

TR: That was a nice house. In Waterford, it was near the airport right there.

DC: So why did you want to move to Maplecrest?

TR: Well, the house, it was a small house. And my mother wanted something a little nicer than what she had. And so we had, you know, we got a little bit money, a little bit more equity in the house. So they could sell that and because of that they had a little bit bigger down payment. And she wanted that house.

CR: And unbeknownst to them when they sold the house . . .shortly afterwards, Pontiac Motors wanted to buy up some land to have some more. And so the people that they sold the house to evidently knew that Pontiac was going to do that. So, you know, that's why they bought the house and then sold it to Pontiac Motors. And then it became a parking lot. But your parents didn't know that.

TR: Then it became a parking lot. They tore the houses down later on.

DC: So if you had held off another year or so . . .

TR: A year or so . . .

CR: Then they might've gotten . . .

TR: They really would've got more money. I don't, you know, because we don't know really how much they got for it. So maybe they got less, too, you never know.

CR: When you were . . .from Kingswood School, that's when you went to work at Pontiac?

TR: Yeah. After . . .

CR: But you should go back to your dad, then, and how he got in. Because then that goes with you.

TR: So, you know, so after we had moved to Maplecrest and then my dad, well he had an application in at Pontiac Motors. And, well, at that point . . .Because he wanted to get out of Superior Metal. You know, he liked it there but there were no benefits. None whatsoever. And so he knew if he was getting sick or anything, you know, that he'd be losing money. And so he couldn't afford it. And of course we had heard that at Pontiac Motors there were benefits. You know, if you got sick you got paid, the pensions and all of that. So he had his application in but he wasn't, but they didn't hire anybody at the time. So they, so then one time one of our Dutch friends got hired in as a welder at Pontiac Motor. And then there was a little party for some of the Dutch friends together, and they were talking about that he got hired in. And somebody said to my dad, AWouldn't that be something for you?" Well, yeah. Well, the uncle who sponsored us said, AOh, no, that would be nothing for him." Because, you know, if he was in the skilled trade he'd be making more money than he was actually making. So they said no, that wouldn't be anything for him. Well, my dad thought it might be. So he went in and he told who he was, what he was, he had all his papers, and he had all the paperwork from Holland. But of course that was all in Dutch, that he was a welder for twenty . . .or a blacksmith. And of course, blacksmiths are welders also in Holland. That he, you know, had that; had twenty-five years worth of paperwork to show what he did. And, well, the guy said, ABut we don't know that, you know, because we can't read the Dutch. That's Dutch papers and everything else." And so they called a guy in to interview him from the skilled trades. And my dad said to him, said, AWell, I'll tell you what you do." He said, AWhy don't you let me work here for a couple weeks and if you don't like what I do, then you just tell me to go." And so he says, AWell, that's fair enough." So they actually did take him in and they had him weld a pipe. And then they got somebody to cut the pipe through the weld to see how the weld was. And the weld was perfect. And so that's why he said, AOK, that sounds like a good enough deal." And so he hired him in, and so my dad went back to the employment office at Pontiac Motor and filled out the paperwork. So when he had it all done he said, ANow I have a son who needs a job." (Which is me). So they got my file out and before my dad came home I already had a call to come on in.

CR: For an interview.

DC: For what job?

TR: For assembly. Assembly line. So I went in and they hired me right there.

DC: OK, so they hired you. All right. Were they hiring others at the time?

TR: They were hiring some people, but not too many. Because this was in >64 in August. And really the big hiring was done in >65. So they did hire some people in >64. There were more people in my area with the same seniority, so they did hire some people. But so then I got hired in and my brother . . .

DC: What was he doing?

TR: Who?

DC: Your brother.

TR: OK, my oldest brother, he was working at Rochester Paper Mill at the time. And he said, AWell gee, if you got hired in Pontiac Motors, you're gonna be making more money than I am and that's . . .I don't like that!", you know. [laughs] So my dad said, AWell, they got your name in the files." He said, AJust go over there and tell them who you are, you know."

CR: And that you're a Romain.

TR: And you're a Romain. So, well my brother went there and sure enough, they pulled out his file. AYou're a Romain. We just hired your dad, we hired your brother. You're hired." So they hired him in. And they made him an inspector while he was there.

DC: Wow, really? Right at the time?

TR: Yeah, right at the time. Yeah, they hired him in right as an inspector.

CR: They I think were very impressed with what your dad had to do. Of course, they didn't know what kind of training and that sort of thing that goes on in Holland. And here's somebody that walks in that basically they have no knowledge of; and he can weld, he can do all these things. If he's that skilled and that trained, you know, the family members probably are following in the footsteps. So that's how it all kinda came to be.

TR: That's how it all came to be.

DC: That's the risk they ran, anyway.

TR: Right. And of course, for my dad to be . . .because, of course, he had to join to UAW . . .

CR: And about the journeyman and apprenticeship.

TR: Yeah, and he had to be a journeyman. And of course the UAW said, AWe cannot make you a journeyman because you gotta prove that you've got your time in." And so my dad said, AWell I got all this paperwork." And they said, AWell, that is great but you need to get that translated." And so we had to find out who can . . .and it had to be officially approved by the court. Because you can't just say, AWell, I'll translate this." So my brother, my older brother, he found somebody at the courthouse who . . .

CR: A judge.

TR: A judge who was actually from Dutch descent. And she said, you know, AI cannot . . ."

CR: They wanted her to translate it so it was official.

TR: AI cannot translate this, of course, for you; but if you will translate it", she said, Athen I will take a look at it and I will sign the papers." And that is what she did. So my dad could turn in all this time and so then he became a journeyman.

DC: OK, so the UAW accepted his [?] once he had it translated.

TR: Right.

DC: OK. I talked to someone recently who moved to Pontiac from Birmingham, England and had the same kind of situation. Language wasn't such a problem but training was different and so they had to be approved, and that was tricky.

TR: Right.

DC: OK. Well I was gonna ask you if anyone bothered to translate it, but you've solved that problem for me. So there was a judge, or was it someone who worked in the court?

TR: She was . . .I guess she was a judge. Yeah, she was a judge.

CR: A woman judge.

TR: Yeah, a woman judge at that time. Yeah.

DC: Interesting.

TR: I don't know what kind of a judge she was, but she was a judge of Dutch descent.

CR: And she was willing to do that.

TR: She was willing to do that, so that was pretty good.

CR: So you worked on the assembly line.

DC: Yeah, tell me about that work. What was your first job like?

TR: Well, my first job, I was first hired in Plant 9. That is where they told me to come in. And so I came there and they told me what department. Well, you know, it's a big plant and I had to go look all around the morning when I came in there, of course, you know, AWhere do I go?" So [?] asking questions, OK, well finally I made it there. Well, they didn't know I was coming, but they said, AOK, we'll put you on a grinding machine here." And so . . .a rod, a piston rod grinding. So they had me work there for, in fact for a week I worked there. And then the foreman came with papers and he said, AYou're going to Plant 5 next week."

DC: So one week.

TR: So one week I worked in Plant 9.

CR: It also had to be during that time, too, as far as when you actually started because your seniority date changed because of the strike.

TR: Yeah that came later.

CR: Oh, did that come later? Oh, after.

DC: Sneaking up on that. So I know you were only there for a week, but I'm still curious to know how you learned the grinding job to the extent that you learned it in one week. Who taught you?

TR: Actually it was a machine that did it. All they had to do is put the rods in when they came and they went, there was a big turntable and you put them in one end; took them out of a bin, and just put them on the turntable. And the machine did the grinding. And they came around the other side to put them on the other turntable, and it would grind the other side of the rods.

DC: So you just had to move the pieces.

TR: All I had to do is move the pieces. I didn't actually have to grind it myself. So that it was not that hard to do. In fact, it was a nice easy job, really. [laughs]

DC: Did you like it for that whole week?

TR: Yeah, I kind of enjoyed the job. I thought, AWell if this is the toughest job, that is pretty good!" But I could see that wasn't the toughest job, but it was a really nice job.

DC: How was the pay compared to the Kingswood School and the restaurant work and all that?

TR: Oh, much better because I went from, like, a dollar and a little bit an hour leaving the Kingswood School . . .I don't know, I was probably making a little bit more than minimum

wage but not that much. But I went right away a dollar more an hour. Because at this one I think I got, like, $2.50 an hour when I got hired in, you know. So that made a big difference. So then, of course, this was nice the first week because I was hired in a day shift. And I could just walk in the morning and go home in the afternoon. Well, that wasn't gonna last, naturally. So I got sent to Plant 5 on midnight shift.

DC: Oh, OK. Did you get bumped, do you think? Is that what happened?

TR: No, because I guess they really didn't need me in Plant 9 so that is why I got . . .because they cannot bump in from one plant to another.

DC: Oh, ok; it was all plant-wide.

TR: So they, right. So they couldn't do that. So I got sent to Plant 5 then, and that was differential assembly. In fact, Plant 9 was engine assembly. So then they put me on an assembly line there to put the bolts on the end of the differential; I had to put the gasket on and the cover on, and then put half the bolts in there.

CR: And at first you said, AHow do I keep up?"

TR: Oh, terrible trying to get, you know, put that stuff on it; grab five bolts (Because it had ten bolts in there). Five bolts, you gotta put these right in the holes and all that stuff.

CR: And the next one is coming down the line.

TR: And the next one is coming down the line, you know, so it was a little tough time to keep up, you know, as you're starting out. But I had a nice foreman, Bill [?], and he was a good guy. And so he . . .

DC: What made him a good guy?

TR: He was a good guy because, you know, he understood. He said some of the coworkers were complaining because, of course, I couldn't . . .you know, I had a hard time keeping up. Sometimes the other guy had to put all the ten bolts in for me because I couldn't. Because, you know, I got him behind. You know, so they weren't too happy with it. And so the foreman gave me time; and he said . . .you know, he figured I'm gonna get it, I'm gonna be All right. Which I did.

DC: How long did it take you to get up to speed?

TR: It probably took me about a week or so to get to where I, you know, to really get up to speed where nobody had to help me anymore. And so I worked there for awhile . . .

CR: You also have to say, too, because that was back in the day (I don't know if it's still true), in ninety days, the first ninety days, you could get fired for any reason. You don't keep up, you don't do anything, whatever. So his foreman was nice to say, AWell give this guy a

chance", rather than just saying, AOK, we'll get somebody else."

TR: Yeah, for no reason whatsoever.

DC: In three days he could've just given you the boot and . . .

CR: So your foreman was nice.

TR: There were some foremen that took pride, they were happy to fire people. So there were a lot of those in there. So that's why, I guess, I liked the foreman.

DC: So you were aware that there was a difference between your foreman and some of the others.

TR: Definitely. Uh-huh. Definitely. So I did get along with him. He must've been able to see that I, you know, that I had at least the potential. So he put up with me.

DC: What about . . .tell me more about your coworkers. Were they the same age as you? Younger, older?

TR: They were probably about the same age; maybe some of them were a couple years older. You know, a lot of the people I worked with were about the same age. I worked with them for quite a few years.

DC: So a lot of young people in there.

TR: So there were a lot of young people in there.

CR: But you also have to remember that he's still learning English. And the slang of English. The English he had was British English, and not American English. So that was not only learning the job, but having to deal with the language kind of a situation, too.

DC: Right. So how did your coworkers get along, I mean, how did they treat you?

TR: At first the guy that worked with me, he did not treat me very well. He wasn't nice to me at all. But, you know, I had no choice. I had to work with him. I had to make the best out of it. And I guess he didn't like that he had to put an extra bolt in for me once in awhile or something like that. And he was, I guess he was just a jerk. But I put up with it for awhile and I got to the point where I was ok and I could keep up. Well later on he got moved somewhere else and then I got his job, and then somebody else got put in my old job, which was the next one, which was only putting five bolts in there, and then put the machine up that torqued all the bolts down. And so I got to that and I liked that better. So I did that for awhile. So in the meantime then, my brother got hired there and he became the inspector and he was on the same line that I was.

DC: Oh he was, he inspected your line?

TR: Yeah. He was inspector on my line.

DC: How did that work out?

TR: That worked out OK. Because, you know, we had worked before together, actually, because we worked at [?] Restaurant before. So that worked out OK, you know, but then later on he went to day shift and I stayed on . . .no, he went to afternoon shift and I stayed on midnights still. In fact, for that time, you know, my dad was working days and my brother was working second shift and I was working third shift.

CR: And you had one car; you had to take . . .

TR: No, no . . .we all had our own car.

CR: Or did you have . . .by that time you already had your own car. But your mother was cooking all day long for everybody coming in and going out and packing lunches for everybody as they were coming in and going out.

TR: We were always coming and going, so my mother was cooking two dinners every day and stuff like that.

DC: Well what did she think about America at that point in time? She had these hopes of a better life; what did she think of it at that point in time?

CR: People were very nice to your mother.

TR: Yeah.

CR: Back when they had first come and they lived on East Beverly, Because you came in February of >62, at Thanksgiving time a neighbor cooked a turkey for her. I mean, people were really . . .Americans were pretty nice to your family because the Dutch people were pretty nice.

TR: They were.

CR: So I think that went pretty smooth . . .I mean, people were trying to help.

TR: It went pretty smooth. We had a lot of, you know, there were a lot of Dutch people in the area and we've, of course, gotten to know these people.

DC: Did you get together with them?

TR: Yes, we did. Uh-huh. And they were very nice.

CR: There was a Dutch club.

DC: When you got together did you speak Dutch or English?

TR: Mostly . . .some spoke mostly English and others would speak mostly Dutch and, you know, mostly a combination of the two. [laughs] So that worked really nice and we had, you know, unfortunately all these people are older and a lot of them are dead now, but we had a lot of good years with a lot of these people. We had a good time with them. That made our transition here to the US much easier than had it been, you know, if there were just all Americans. In some ways maybe it didn't help was because, you know, if you get put in the middle of English-speaking people, well you're gonna speak English a lot faster than if there's . . .and of course for us it wasn't so bad, but for my mother that was because she never worked out of the house here and so she spoke Dutch most of the time. She didn't drive. So she never learned the language as good as she probably could've otherwise, you know.

CR: Yet she spoke fluently.

TR: But yeah, she spoke good English, though, not like some people that come here from foreign countries and they never really learn to speak it. But my mother did. She learned to speak good English.

DC: I haven't learned much about the Dutch community here in this part of the state and so that's very interesting to me. I've talked to a number of people of Polish ancestry . . .

TR: Yeah. Right.

CR: Was never as large as, like, the Polish community. It was much smaller.

TR: No. We were all separated, you know.

CR: And there was a Dutch club that was active for years even before your family came here.

TR: Yeah.

DC: OK. And what did they do at the Dutch club?

TR: They had, you know, dances . . .

CR: And then in the early days they put on plays.

TR: Yeah, they put on plays and everything.

CR: Quite active.

TR: But basically it was a lot of camaraderie. We had parties almost every week at somebody else's house, you know, so we had all turns.

CR: For birthdays and anniversaries.

TR: For birthdays and anniversaries, you name it. And there were so many of them that hardly a week went by that there wasn't a party someplace.

DC: Do you remember those parties?

TR: Oh yes.

CR: Oh yeah, I remember them, too.

DC: You remember them, too. OK.

TR: Oh yeah. They were very nice. We've had them here, in fact, too. Yeah.

CR: The one thing that I was impressed, looking at it as an American . . .the first time I went to a Dutch party, I sat down and you sat someplace else. And people just started talking to me. And growing up in Ohio, anyway, if you didn't know people, well you were hesitant to talk to them because you didn't know them. And the first few times, I couldn't believe people just started talking and they were having a good time and laughing. And when they played Dutch songs . . .like one lady said, AWell you don't have to know the words, just la la la with the music and have a good time!" But it was strange to me because all of a sudden, I just walked in and I was accepted right away. Different than sort of the American culture at the time. And this Dutch culture . . .and the other thing that I was impressed at, and of course our society here has changed, but they would have these parties and they had a definite . . .you came in, you had coffee, you had some dessert. And then you would have drinks, you would socialize, talk, play music. But the host, whose ever house it was at, it was not BYOB, the host would serve the drinks. So they would know what to serve, how much to serve. And all evening long the hostess would be passing out trays of food. So even though people were drinking, they were eating a lot. Then before you went home you served coffee, you served sandwiches, you served, you know, a little bit of cake. So in all of these parties, as much fun and as much as people did drink, everyone went home sober. Even back many, many years ago. And this was the whole process that anytime you had a party, this is what you did. So you never had any problems with people getting drunk or people being unruly or people . . .because it was all kind of . . .and I thought, AWhat a wonderful way to have parties where people can have a good time." And everybody kind of took their turns, so you were going to parties all the time, which was really . . .

DC: So you just hunker down and host one and but then you get to be the guest at a later time.

TR: Right. Yeah.

CR: And they followed the same procedure, different than some American parties where things get out of hand or people bring their own and, you know, then you have problems with it.

So I was kind of impressed with that. It's a little off the subject.

DC: No, no. It's something that you obviously cared about . . .

CR: About society of the different kinds of things.

TR: It all ties in, you know?

DC: I'm sure it helped your family feel more at home, as well, here.

TR: Definitely. Yeah, you know, that made it so nice because we had, really, family right away through all the friends that we had.

CR: And yet other people were kind to your parents, too. Neighbors and . . .

TR: Oh, absolutely. The neighbors would go to, you know . . .

DC: What was the neighborhood like when you went out to, what was it called?

CR: Maple Crest.

DC: Maple Crest, right. It's on the other page here.

TR: Maple Crest, it was kind of quiet. We didn't really talk too much to the neighbors. We had an elderly lady living next door to us and so, and we didn't really talk much with her. We did have neighbors on one side that we talked to. In fact, she wrote me once in awhile while I was in Vietnam. But other than that, we didn't really talk too much because I was basically working. I was involved with the . . .well, at that time I wasn't involved in the [?] yet, but basically that's what I was doing. Just working, sleeping.

CR: We were talking, too, about in the beginning of when you were working . . .we were talking about bathroom situations; how you had to wait for somebody before you could, you know, wait for a relief man, like you said; you got only certain breaks.

DC: Tell me about that, yeah.

TR: When I got hired in . . .Because we only had a seven minute break in the morning and then we got a twelve minute break a little later on and a twelve minute break in the afternoon and that was it.

DC: Was the first twelve minute break for a lunch?

TR: No, we got a half hour for lunch. But of course that was an unpaid lunch. So we did get a, you got seven minutes, then twelve minutes before lunch. And then you got twelve minutes after lunch and that was it for the eight hour day.

CR: And then you went to the bathroom because you couldn't go.

TR: That's the time you had to go to the bathroom and do anything, eat, and whatever you wanted to do, and have the snack, because that's all the time you got.

DC: Now you had a relief man, then, who would fill in for you . . .

TR: Yeah, we had a relief man at that time.

DC: So that means the breaks were staggered.

TR: Right. Yeah.

DC: So you were just on your own, pretty much, during your break.

TR: During the break you were on your own. You had to be back on time or you get hollered at. [laughs]

CR: And basically you had to do what people told you to do.

TR: Right. I mean, you know, the union wasn't quite as strong yet, of course, and plus . . .well, they were strong enough, but you still . . .things were quite different then from what they are today.

DC: Well tell me about that. Because a lot of people think that the union was really strong even in the '50's. But you're talking about the early >60's and you're saying that it wasn't . . .

CR: Well not in the plant, generally speaking it was.

TR: Generally the union was, of course, the union movement was. But . . .

DC: What about in the plant?

TR: But as far as in the plant was concerned, if your foreman told you to do something, you just better do it because the union wasn't gonna get you off for anything because . . .

CR: Whether it was safe or it wasn't safe, it didn't matter.

TR: Safety wasn't quite the same issue as it is today.

DC: Can you give me any examples from your own experience?

TR: Well, if . . .like if I had to go to the bathroom or anything else, you know, today if I had to do it and I really had to go, I'd have to either shut the line down and go. Now in most places you can call somebody, a team leader or somebody to go do it. Because, you know, you gotta go, you gotta go. In those days, well you do it right in place if nobody comes

because you don't walk off that job no matter what. Because if you do, you're gone, you're fired. And the union couldn't get you off for that at that time. And so if you were on the job; if you were a minute late they could fire you at the time. Or discipline you or whatever. Well today if you're a minute late, well OK, you're a minute late, you know?

CR: It's not quite . . .but even safety-wise, they could tell you to do stuff or . . .

TR: But safety-wise, at that time it didn't matter whether it was safe or not. If your foreman told you to go, AI want you to do this job right here", you just went ahead and did it.

DC: Did that ever happen to you? Did they ever ask you to do something that you thought was unsafe?

TR: Yeah, I was. You know, but not so much in the early days because there was . . .basically, it was all cut and dry assembly line work what I did, you know. Later on, when I moved to pressed metal, they've asked me to work on a press that I knew was not safe press to work on. I told them, AI'm not running that press."

DC: When was that? After you went to pressed metal . . .

TR: Yeah. That's much later . . .

CR: Did you still work in . . .when you went to Vietnam? You should tell him about that.

DC: Yeah, we're sneaking up on that. I was just trying to get a sense for what that . . .well, I guess, you moved to Plant 5.

TR: But that's the differ . . .yeah, I was still in Plant 5.

DC: How long were you on the job in Plant 5?

TR: I was on the job for . . .well, actually six months and I went to, then I went to second shift. And I don't know . . .I think they eliminated third shift at that time. Yeah, that is why. And so I went to second shift. And they had built a new line. Because I was . . .yeah, I gotta think. Yeah, Because they had a line that you had to push all the [?] by hand, and then they got an automated line built in. And so I moved to that one then, and that was after six months. And they put me on second shift then because they didn't need the third shift anymore. So I worked on that and, in fact, in the very same job still. We had to still put those . . .but then they had a machine that torqued the bolts down and all you had to do was put the bolts in there. And so we did that. That's when I worked with [?], the one at this [?], you know, I [?] once in awhile. So I did that for the next, for about another five, six months. Then I got my draft notice.

CR: Now he still was not a US citizen.

TR: I wasn't a US citizen, but I had exactly one year at Pontiac Motor. And of course, and the

one thing about all of us in Plant 5 in the beginning; we went on strike because we had a local strike in 1964. Because that's why . . .you know, I got hired in in August but my seniority date was October because of the fact that I lost that time because I didn't have my ninety days in when we went on strike. I was worried that I could lose my job if I go on strike. Yeah, I go on strike and I just got hired in. I don't wanna go on strike, you know?

CR: And that was a little [?]. The ninety days, you could be out. So that was . . .

TR: But that didn't happen, of course, and the union took care of that and I walked the picket lines and stuff like that.

DC: So you walked the picket lines really before you even had . . .

TR: Right. To get my union strike fund I had to do that, of course.

DC: Well, a few questions come to mind. I know we need to get to the draft notice and all that stuff, too. But one thing: when they eliminated the third shift, were you worried that you would lose your job then, as well? Because that would be a big contraction; did you have enough seniority to be pretty sure of keeping your job?

TR: Yeah, I had enough. I guess I never even thought about it, I guess.

CR: >Course in >65 they were hiring people, even though they eliminated that shift, maybe they had work other places. Because you said they hired a lot more people in >65. So that's probably why it wasn't . . .he knew he had to go someplace else, but there was a job.

DC: OK. But if not for that, if you're eliminated from the shift, that could mean a lot of pressure on those remaining jobs. So I was just wondering about that.

TR: Yeah, that's true. Yeah, no I wasn't worried about it because nobody ever talked about layoff. Because at that time they were actually hiring.

DC: It was starting to pick up, OK. So the overall employment was [??] the third shift.

TR: If they still kept cutting, yeah.

DC: And then, do you have any recollection at all about what the local strike issues were in 1964? You hadn't really experienced them, though.

TR: Right. I don't really even know what they were [laughs], what they were for.

CR: He just walked on the picket line.

TR: I just walked on the picket line.

DC: So you just showed up. OK. First day, gotta walk the picket line.

TR: Right. [laughs]

DC: What do you remember about the picket lines?

TR: I remember this bitter cold that time and they were, the union officials would come around with pots of coffee and stuff in their station wagons, you know, they're coming with that. Because I know I was there at night. Because we didn't spend every day at the picket line. There were only certain times that you had to come. So that's all I remember. We were basically just standing around. You know, we weren't shouting or anything. So that time, that's basically all. And they just settled the strike, then, and in fact my dad, he was on strike, too. And he got higher . . .he went back earlier because he was skilled trades in the plant and he had to get everything, how to get everything started back up. Because I think the strike was, what, about four weeks, I think, or so. Yeah, it was about four week strike

CR: [inaudible]

DC: OK. Let's see, I don't know if I asked you the same kind of set of questions about Plant 5 there, you know, about your coworkers. With Plant 9 you said they were all pretty much your age.

TR: That was Plant 5.

DC: That was Plant 5, OK. I have to remember my own questions here. What about the racial makeup of the workers there; were there black workers and white workers in Plant 5?

TR: Yeah. Yeah, there were.

DC: OK. Because not only is it the period heading into Vietnam, but it's also a period of great civil rights agitation. I was wondering if you had any recollection at all about those occurrences in the plant?

TR: Actually, yes. You know, we had a lot of both blacks and Mexicans and white people. You know, the three of the group. And actually we got along pretty well.

DC: Did you? OK.

TR: Yeah. You know, I don't ever remember any time, you know, save some individual thing . . .but I mean, as a whole we never had, really, that much trouble at Pontiac Motor between the three groups.

CR: Now, of course I come a little bit later, but I come from a much different background. And my impression, the first few times we stood in unemployment lines for you to register and this sort of thing; I was truly impressed with the fact that there were all different nationalities, different kinds of language backgrounds, and everyone whether it was when I went in the plant just to tour the plant, or in unemployment lines or that, how everybody got

along so well together. And no one distinguished between the Mexicans, the Spanish people, the white people, the black people. Everybody just got together and there were some people . . .Because he always came home and talked to me about this . . .we always had coffee when he came home, and we talked about what happened during the day. Not just the major things but the everyday things. You talked about a lot of people and some of these people, it was years later that I found out that they actually were Mexicans or they were Asians or they were blacks, or whatever they were. It was like, it truly didn't matter. And I came from more an isolated kind of white, Caucasian area. And I was like, wow, that all these people get along so well together. I went to a small Lutheran college, Whittenburg, in Ohio. In my high school we really didn't have any Mexicans. We didn't have any blacks. When I went to Whittenburg it was basically all white, Caucasian. We had a few of other nationalities and that. But they were very well accepted. But there were only a few. And my experience . . .about the third year that I was at Whittenburg, and I think it was a federal thing, they had to have more diversity. So they start offering full tuition scholarships to these other groups. And the whole atmosphere on the campus changed. Because now you looked at all these people: AAre you one of the ones that got full tuition scholarships and I'm not eligible because I'm not like you?" And here, then I come up here . . .we get married. And there's these people all mixing together like what you would've hoped would've always been like that. And to me, that was a very, very impressive . . .you know, no one got together and said, AWell, we have to have diversity training, we have to have cultural acceptance. We have to . . ." No, they just all had a job to do, they all did it together, and like you said, there were never any problems with it and you did all get along. And to me, that's . . .if that could happen in a plant . . .now maybe it didn't happen in other plants, I don't know, but it happened in yours, why can't the world be like . . .why is there all the problems that there are?

DC: It's interesting. So from your vantage point coming from Euclid and then Whittenburg . . .

CR: And then coming to this place with thousands of people, and it didn't matter who you were, what you were, what your background, what your religion. And you all got together. I mean, you all got along.

TR: That's right.

DC: Did you guys get together outside the plant?

CR: That you didn't do.

TR: No. No. That we never did.

CR: But you never did with anybody. You never did with anybody; he did . . .socialize.

TR: I never did with the white people, either, so you know, I never really socialized outside the plant with anybody.

CR: You do now; with the retiree chapter we do a lot. With Mexicans, with all nationalities.

TR: But while I was working, we never really did, you know? And that's a funny thing.

CR: Socially coming back here, that is kind of interesting.

TR: It really is, you know.

DC: But it sounds like your social world was much more tied to the Dutch community at that point in time.

TR: At that point it was. Yeah, it really was, you know.

DC: That's very interesting.

CR: I have a just kind of . . .well I think that's impressive for way back then because the civil rights, everything, and here; how come they don't have any problems? They've got thousands of people.

TR: The civil rights, you know, I think was already in the plan. It was already there.

CR: Taken care of.

TR: It was taken care of. We really didn't have any major problems between any of us.

CR: And there were foremen, there were line workers, there were inspectors, there were skilled trade, so . . .

DC: There were black foremen and Mexican foremen as well?

TR: Yeah, there were. Uh-huh. Yeah.

DC: Because you see that the conventional wisdom in the labor history books is that blacks were always segregated in different departments. And the idea that . . .

CR: But was for sal . . .I think it was more for salaried and the upper echelon people. I think that probably is true with the executives and that. They were not in the . . .but on the plant floor it was . . .

TR: In the plant we worked side by side.

DC: In assembly, yeah, in production I think you're right. I think skilled trades were still pretty segregated. But until the mid-sixties or early to mid-sixties, I don't think the union had much to do with deciding who got into skilled trades. Your dad would've come in during that kind of watershed period, I think, but during the '50's, at least at Pontiac Motor, I think it was management who decided who got into the skilled trades. But this is very interesting to hear about . . .

CR: This is kind of a social thing. I guess in a little side to that, too, when our boys were applying to colleges and for scholarships, when they said, AAre you of any kind of minority status?", we kept wanting to put down, AThey're Dutch, and that's minority." But that didn't count. Well if you count all these others, what's wrong with the Dutch. You know, it doesn't count for that.

DC: Well, it's because of Indonesia, I guess, or something.

CR: So then you have to kinda sorta get to how you got . . .you were starting talking about getting drafted.

DC: Yeah, that was next on my list here. You're right with me here. Usually I step ahead.

TR: So then I got drafted in the army.

CR: Well you got your draft notice, now what did you do?

TR: Well I had my physical first and stuff.

DC: When exactly did the draft notice arrive?

TR: I don't know exactly because well, first I got the notice for my physical, earlier during the year, my first year at Pontiac Motors. And that was some time during the summer when I went in >65. So then I went in for the physical and, of course, it's OK. So in the fall I got my draft notice.

CR: And you were talking about going to enlist in the navy.

TR: Yeah, I had a . . .well, in fact, this uncle of mine who had the milk route, he had a son and he was in the naval reserves. And so he said (after I got my draft notice), AWell, I'll take you and you could sign up for the naval reserves and maybe they'll keep you out of the army."

CR: Out of Vietnam.

TR: Out of Vietnam. So he took me there and, oh yeah, everything was just fine. I filled in the paperwork. But the army said, ASorry but we got ya' first." So . . .

CR: Well, and at that time, too, people were getting exemptions if they got married. He knew somebody who quick got married so they would get exempted. If you were in college you got exempted. You could go to Canada. But the only thing is, if you didn't go into the military, you could've gone back to Holland.

TR: Yeah, I could've.

CR: Because you had to either serve in Holland in their military or here. But if he elected to go back to Holland then he never could've come back here. And of course, the family . . .that would've been it. So that wasn't an option.

TR: Since my family was over here, you know, I'm not gonna do that.

CR: And he wasn't going to Canada as a draft dodger. That he was not gonna do, either.

DC: Did your brother get a draft notice, as well?

TR: No, see my older brother, he served in the Dutch army before he came. And so he didn't have to serve here. And so he was exempt. So when I got my draft notice . . .in fact, the guy working beside me, he was the same age I was, he got his draft notice the same day. But he had a girlfriend and so they got married right away and so he didn't have to go, not even in the army. So in October I had just . . .my seniority date, this was October 1. And so after . . .October 4 I went in the army.

CR: And he was still not a citizen, he was still an alien. A lot of people don't realize that there were fifty thousand aliens that still had to serve in the military.

TR: They shipped me to Fort Knox for basic training. And after that I went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina and for the advanced training on Howitzers. And so after that I had . . .well it was then August, the following August, that I got my notice to go overseas.

DC: >66 at that point?

TR: That was in >66. Yeah.

CR: Luckily I didn't know him then. I would've been in a terrible shape for the year had I known him then.

DC: What did your family think about you going into the military?

TR: Well, they weren't too happy, of course. My mother was, I think she was a nervous wreck the whole year that I was in Vietnam.

CR: And she really had problems later, sickness-wise, I think because of that year.

TR: Because of it, I think.

CR: Of course in Vietnam it was different than Desert Storm because all you could do is write letters home. I mean, there were no telephones, no email, none of that, of course.

TR: Yeah, you couldn't call home, nothing.

DC: Sure. I keep thinking back to your mother being the real driving force behind the family's

move and I'm wondering, and I'm kind of just imagining as historians do, just sort of wonder; I don't know, but it may not have been the plan that she envisioned.

CR: I'm sure it wasn't.

TR: Naturally it wasn't, of course. And of course when we came here, Vietnam really wasn't quite an issue.

DC: How would you know, yeah.

TR: How would you know. If it had been, maybe she might have said, AWell, you know, we shouldn't do that because obviously somebody was gonna get drafted in the army."

CR: And it was gonna be you.

TR: And so that wasn't an issue . . .

End of Side A, Tape II

Beginning of Side B, Tape II

DC: The question that was on my mind, we're still talking about Vietnam and stuff, but I was wondering . . .in your training you would've gotten, I assume, thrown together with people from all around. I wonder what that was like for you?

CR: Well that's another story.

TR: Right.

DC: You've had this little slice of Americana here in Pontiac and Waterford. What was it like going into the basic training camp?

CR: Because there's still . . .you still have a language and you still have a slang American language that you didn't have.

TR: Right, I didn't have. Of course, my English was pretty good at the time because I was here three years now so, you know, it wasn't bad. There were a few . . .I was still, you know, still had a heavy accent at the time and stuff like that. But I still . . .a few things that I didn't understand, you know, like some of the slang and stuff. But basically, you know, I got along with the people pretty good at basic training and stuff, and also the other training that I had on the Howitzers at Fort Bragg. So I got along with people pretty good.

CR: But you said one thing that was different with some, like Desert Storm and that, when you

got sent to Vietnam, you got sent as replacement people. You didn't go with your unit. So you got dumped there as a replacement person and you said when you went over there everybody was, AWell, it's nice you came now. We had to do all the work building the camp, putting up the shelters, doing all of this, and you just arrive now and everything is done." So you had that to face when you went over there.

TR: Right. I had to overcome that when I first arrived in Vietnam . . .because when I first arrived they gave us a [?] M-14 weapon and you gotta go drive from Saigon to Ku Chi [sp?], which was a thirty-nine mile trip. And so we, you know, if we happened to have to fire a weapon, I don't know if it actually would've. [laughs] Luckily never had to try. But anyway, so we made it, you know, we got over there. And I came to this Howitzer unit, eight inch Howitzers. And well, of course, like you said; you know, they were happy to see replacements but on the other hand, you know, they were kind of resenting of the fact that we just walked in where they had to build the whole thing up. Because they came as a whole unit with nothing, of course, and then they had to build a shelter. They had to build everything that they had. And so in some cases, yeah, I can understand what they're saying, but then that's life, you know. So I had to overcome that kind of resentment and so they tried to take that out on me a little bit and I'm pretty sure I wasn't the only one, but I was the only one in that section at that time that came in. And so they tried to fool around with a few things.

CR: You have to tell him the story with the lanyard.

TR: Yeah, I'll tell you the story with the lanyard. And of course, it's a language problem; I didn't even know what the lanyard was, you know. And so we were sitting in the motor pool in the morning and . . .because, you know, we had all these duties to do every day. And so they, we were cleaning up some of our equipment and the sergeant told me to go to the motor pool and get lanyard grease and to grease the lanyard. OK. You know, the way it was said, I knew something was not quite right, you know? But so I went to the motor pool and I told the sergeant over at the motor pool, AI need some grease." He said, AWhat do you need it for?" I said, AI don't know, the sergeant told me that I needed some grease." And so he gave me a little bit of grease there. So I don't know what I did to find out what the lanyard was, but by the time I came back there I knew what the lanyard was. And anyway, so I . . .

CR: Tell him what it is, Because he probably doesn't know what the lanyard is.

TR: Well that's, it's nothing but a piece of rope that you pull the trigger with on a gun, is what it was.

CR: To fire the gun.

DC: On a Howitzer this is?

TR: A Howitzer, yeah.

CR: On a Howitzer, on a *huge* . . .

TR: Eight inch Howitzer. And so OK, I found out what that was, and so I . . .that thing was so stiff, I didn't know it was actually metal or whatever it was, or rope, or what it was. You know, you could hardly see Because that thing was already, well wasn't really old, but it was old for the time, I guess. In six months this stuff can look pretty old. So I didn't know what it was. I thought, well maybe this metal they want to put the grease on for that reason or whatever. But so I greased the thing heavily.

CR: He greased it. That's what he's told.

TR: I greased it. So OK, it was done. So that night, that guy that pulls the lanyard because [?], he was mad. He was steaming mad. He had to pull the lanyard and that thing was so greasy. [laughs] He was steaming mad. So I said, AHey, you know," I said . . .

CR: They asked him, AWhy did you do that?"

TR: They said, AWhy did you do that?!" I said, AWell, there's the sergeant there; you go to him." I said, AHe's the one that told me to do it."

CR: ASo I did it!"

TR: And I did it. I said, AYou know, he's got more stripes than I have. He told me to do it, that's it, you know?" So that's the last time they ever pulled any of that stuff. So that was good. Later on, you know, it was probably a month later, the guy actually came and sat on my bed with me and said, AYou know," he said, Awhen you first came here, I didn't like you." He said, ABut you're a pretty good guy." [laughs] So we made it All right.

CR: So he had to not only fight the Vietcong, worry about staying alive, but he also had to sort of show everybody else that, you know, he knew what was going on and he was . . .

TR: Right. And then I started to drive the truck for our gun section and I became a, I got a rank to go with that. So that was pretty good.

DC: So that was your job then?

TR: So that was my job.

CR: Well and then you were in charge of a gun clip [?].

TR: I was an S and S, Because I was spec four then and we had a corporeal at two specs forcing our section. And so we had, since we were the higher ranks than the rest of the guys, we had a night crew and turns, you know, we took turns to do night firing when we were called on.

CR: I said also with that, you told me that in the beginning they were allowing people to go on

two R&R's. So as soon as he could sign up for an R&R, he figured, AIf I'm gonna die here, I'm gonna at least get to go on an R&R as soon as I can." So he went to Japan early on. And then when it came around to the second time, then they weren't letting people go twice. Because of course he saw people on the day before they left get killed. This kind of thing. So he said, you know, you wanna take advantage of anything Because you don't know if you're coming home. I said, like I said earlier, I'm glad that I didn't know you when you were in Vietnam. But I went through school at Wittenburg and I saw a lot of girls say goodbye to guys, their boyfriends and engagements, and they went to Vietnam and I never, Because I graduated and came to Michigan, I never got to talk to anybody who actually was in Vietnam to find out what it was really like. And of course, so I never really knew. Well, the first night that we went out, and of course at that time you didn't really admit that you served in Vietnam because, you know, that was not the best thing to do for a long time. So people didn't talk about it. Well the first night we went out, I found out he had been in Vietnam, so I wanted to know what was it . . .I mean, I never had a chance to ask anybody. And here's somebody for him who's really interested: what was it like over there? What were your experiences? So that kind of made our first date so nice because we had more than enough to talk about for hours and hours. And he had somebody who was really sincerely interested in what happened.

DC: When was that first date? We'll get back to Vietnam in a second, but when did you meet?

TR: We met in August of 1972. Well, we actually met . . .

CR: We went on our first date. We met earlier.

TR: Well, we had met . . .we went on our first date in August 1972. We met earlier.

CR: We met at the International Supper Club in Detroit, which was an organization for half immigrants and half Americans. That's where we met. But that kind of opened a lot of doors. And it was good for you Because that was the first time you got to really talk about Vietnam and feel free to talk about Vietnam. And I was fascinated because of everything that happened. But luckily you came home.

TR: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. I don't know how many of these stories we can get into, but I would be interested in hearing something about what you did experience there. I know you were driving the truck and you were involved in some of the [?].

CR: The one thing that was, you know, the one thing that was beneficial for you; the fact that they were firing this huge Howitzer. Like it would fire ten, fifteen miles. They were not the foot soldiers in the front lines. Even though, like during the daytime Vietcong would be doing their laundry, cutting their hair, and then at night these same people would be throwing grenades. And you never knew.

TR: And mortars.

CR: And mortars and this sort of thing. So you never really knew, there was really no front line. The enemy was all around and later on they found out the tunnels underneath.

TR: I was in Ku Chi, which is now they know that the place is just tunnel after tunnel. The whole thing is like, it's like a Swiss cheese, you know? That's what it was at the time and we were sitting right, actually right on top of Vietcong base, basically. And they were underground and we were above ground.

DC: What did you think about it at the time when you were there?

TR: I guess you . . .well, I didn't like to be there, you know. But other than that, you just spent your days . . .the first time that, you know, when I first came there, it was just bad duties. Really all the kind of lousy things that had to be done. And we didn't get any free time, really, and we got up about the time the sun got up in the morning.

CR: You filled sandbags forever.

TR: We was filling sandbags every day and we were, you know, just a lot of hard work and sometimes it almost felt like just to keep you busy, you know, to keep you doing things. But we did do a lot of work to improve our living conditions and stuff like this, which was a lot of hard work.

CR: You had a TV and you could buy some stuff; you had long extension cords [?] some of the bunkers. They could still watch the TV.

TR: We had a [?]. Because we built all our bunkers and we built, you know, and plus also the living quarters; where we lived we built the little . . .you know, when they first came there, it were all just tents. And, well then later on we built actually wooden buildings with screens and stuff like that. And then we sandbagged all around those things. And we built our bunkers that we had because for every . . .we had in our section, we had four guns, four Howitzers. And, of course, each Howitzer was on a pad, they were a certain distance apart. So we had to build a bunker for the ammunition for those things, too, because you don't want that to blow up.

CR: And sometimes he slept on an ammunition dump. Now can you imagine using pillows of ammunition for your head?

TR: Sometimes, yeah, I mean you do the craziest things that you . . .you know, you would think, AHow could you do that?" But, of course, sometimes we were firing and, you know, we were . . .field operations where we had nothing to, noplace to sleep. So we lined up all these powder bags and we were sleeping right on top of those. Somebody would've thrown a cigarette butt, you would never know what ever happened to me, you know?

CR: But you made it home. That's the important thing. You made it home.

TR: I mean, you do things that you would normally say, AHow could you do that?"

CR: And you were young. You were like twenty-one, twenty-two.

TR: Yeah, you were young at that time, so you do different . . .plus your whole frame of mind, your whole attitude is different. You're there, so you're . . .

CR: That's your life.

TR: That is your life. That is the way your living is. So you're really not thinking about it consciously every day that yeah, they could be shooting at you. And they were, but you just . . .if they do, you just fire back. I mean, if there's a car break down and you got a flat tire, you go change the tire. I mean, that is basically the attitude that you have when you're in that situation.

DC: What did you think about the reasons for being there? Did you feel any sort of fervor for being in Vietnam?

TR: I kind of, you know, I kind of thought . . .well, you know, we were there to fight communism, and I agreed with that. You know, I didn't think it was all wrong at the time that, you know, that they were there for what the reason was there. I didn't like some of the things that went on and some of the . . .you know, what I saw. But I thought the basic reason was a sound reason why they were there.

CR: I think also, too, you came to America, you wanted to keep your Dutch heritage, you wanted to keep your Dutch background, but they came to become Americans. They wanted to become Americanized. They wanted to be Americans and this was one responsibility of Americans or Americans-to-be, so I need to do this. And while you were gone your parents became Americans; went to classes and that sort of thing. They became . . .their five years was up. And the five years was up while you were in Vietnam.

TR: Then I came back and that's right, and then so I became an American citizen when I came back.

CR: Well you told them in Vietnam already that you wanted to become an American citizen.

TR: Right. Because I figured once I had my five years, I should be able to be an American citizen even if I'm in Vietnam, you know. Well, they said, AWell yeah, you can locate your paperwork down here and everything. But you cannot become a citizen while you're here. You'll have to do that back in the States." You know, so they took my fingerprints, they did all of that stuff, but I had to still wait til I came back in the States and then I had to go through all this stuff all over again anyway.

CR: But the interesting thing was your parents had to go to classes for that and pass whatever for this. When it came to him when he came back and he had to go, like, take the test or whatever, they said they asked the questions and then they rattled off the answers. Their

rationale was, AIf you're willing to die for this country, the least we can do is process your citizenship."

DC: If you don't know how long a senator's term is, then so be it.

TR: I had to go to a federal court in Detroit and, you know . . .

CR: Well they asked him who was the first president, they didn't even ask, you know.

TR: They asked me a few questions and the guy that was sitting with me, you know, he kind of answered already as soon as he asked the question, he already answered. He didn't wait for me to even answer the questions, you know, so they put it all down and so I became a citizen that day then.

DC: So did you stay in the same base in Vietnam the entire time?

TR: No . . .well, yes and no, I guess. I guess I gotta say that because, you know, that was our home base but we moved from there all over and then we came back and then we moved somewhere else and we came back. We were at many different places. A lot of time we were over at the Cambodian border. We were actually firing into Cambodia for a long time.

DC: How would you move around the country?

TR: We had, of course we were self propelled because all those Howitzers we had were all self propelled and of course I drove the ammo truck that went with it. And basically what we did is, you know, we had all the ammo on the truck and then of course we had the ammunition section, which carried the bulk ammo along also. So whenever we got in the field, we backed up the truck right up to that Howitzer and in no time we were ready to fire.

CR: We also (and this is just a little side, too), we know he has some hearing loss on high tones. Pontiac Motors tested his hearing regularly both before and after he was in Vietnam. Well, of course they did it in Vietnam, too. Now I don't know what kind of ear protection, whatever, it was not as big a thing in Vietnam. But you were hearing that constantly. After you came back, of course you had your hearing tested regularly at Pontiac Motors, we tried to get records from early days of Pontiac Motors before he went to Vietnam and then records after the fact to find out was his hearing loss from Vietnam? Was it from the plant? Now, when you came back, you wore hearing protection, what was required. But because the tests were different . . .

DC: Oh, they couldn't compare?

CR: They were not comparable.

TR: They couldn't compare, they couldn't figure out which . . .

DC: They changed the test.

CR: So we don't know where that high hearing tones was from. Because of course, it was very . . .I mean, you were firing guns constantly for, like, the year.

TR: Right. Of course, the first year there wasn't a high noise area because, you know, Plant 14 was noise but Plant 5 wasn't that high noise. And of course I never wore earplugs there. We were never issued earplugs in Plant 5.

CR: You didn't, you weren't supposed to.

TR: You were, right, you were . . .

CR: I didn't think about that. You probably, then, had the hearing loss from Vietnam.

TR: It probably was Vietnam because even after I came back, I went back to Plant 5. So that was still awhile. So it's probably not from Pontiac Motor; actually the war is where the loss came from. Probably Vietnam.

CR: But it was just kind of interesting to just sort of see where that might've happened.

DC: Well you talked about how there was some resentment from the soldiers who had built the camp, then you came in and benefitted from their previous work. What was your relationship like with soldiers who were on the front lines? You mentioned that you were often firing ten, fifteen miles away.

CR: You really didn't have any . . .

TR: We never had any relationship with them, really. And, you know, the closest that we had with soldiers from the, well from just the perimeter line, really, later on because we got protection from people with self-propelled twin 40 guns. And, you know, those are smaller guns. They could fire rapidly and, you know, basically machine guns but they're big ones. And they were for perimeter defense. But, you know, that's all we really knew about the people that are in the front lines because we never really talked to the soldiers. We saw them being dropped off and with helicopters and stuff like that, and they went their way. But we basically went our way, you know? And we only got called in for fire support for them. And if they got into a problem or they saw Vietcong someplace, then they called us in to wipe them out. And that is what we did.

CR: I think the one thing that was hard, though, and we've heard this from other people; they had to get always permission to fire. Even if they were being fired on, they still had to get permission. Instead of a war where if you see the enemy, well . . .

TR: That was part of the fallacy of the Vietnam War because you were not allowed to fire until you got permission, even though they were firing at you and you could still not just fire

back at them, you know, unless you got permission to do so. And that was a big fallacy.

DC: Did they have big guns aimed at you, then?

TR: No, see they never had big guns. But they had small arms, and they had mortars. But mostly they had, you know, they always had mortars so they could fire some distance away. Because that is, you know, whenever we got incoming fire it was always mortars.

DC: OK. Because it seems as soon as you fire for the first time everyone would know where you are, wouldn't they?

TR: Yeah, that's right. They would because when they fired, you can see the flash because when that mortar goes off you can see it, or their small arms fires.

DC: Just like you could tell where they are, they could tell where you are.

TR: Exactly. Exactly.

DC: They'd have to be much closer to you, it sounds like, than you would have to be to them.

TR: Right. And so you would think that once we knew you could wipe them right out, you know? But most of the time we didn't.

DC: How long would it take to get permission?

TR: Sometimes you didn't get permission.

CR: It never came.

TR: You cannot fire back and that's it. They'll let, you know, the perimeter guys with the small arms, with fifty calibers, they could fire at them. But our big Howitzers, no way.

DC: OK. And what was the rationale for that?

TR: Even though we . . .who knows what the rationale for the order was, because you know, they just didn't care or didn't . . .who knows? Because there were . . .we've been in situations where we could say we could fire a direct hit right on them and could wipe them all out.

DC: So you could fire pretty accurately.

TR: Oh yeah, we could. I mean, those were big two hundred pound pieces of steel that we were firing around, full of TNT in there. So they, you know, if we had a direct hit on them, that would wipe out quite a few people. Everybody that was sitting in there.

DC: How long would it take you if you knew where you needed to fire, how long would it take

you to set the coordinates or how would you actually fire this Howitzer?

TR: The first one, well if you didn't know anything was going on, we had to get everything ready, would probably take us three minutes. But if we knew we were gonna fire, we could do it in less than a minute. And if we had a fire, like, in succession, we could fire up to three rounds in a minute.

DC: Three rounds in a minute, OK.

CR: I just asked him that the other day.

DC: And how long would it take a shell to travel to its destination?

TR: It's seconds.

DC: Seconds, OK.

TR: Seconds. It sets the speed . . .

DC: Even if you were ten or fifteen miles away it would just take seconds?

TR: If it were fifteen miles away it would probably take, you know, three or four seconds it would be there.

CR: And to be shooting three times every minute; and that noise and the . . .

TR: Right. You have to bring the tube down, you have to bring the [?], we had a hydraulic loader to put them in.

DC: OK, that stuff you never lifted in there.

TR: No. Well, you had to lift them on the loader, but then . . .

DC: Oh really?

TR: Yeah.

DC: How many people would it take . . .

TR: Sometimes loader would be broke down, too, Because we had to load actually, you could put from the truck, put it on the . . .and you have to lift around on the loader, but then the loader would bring it up to the tube. But if you really wanted to fire fast, we'd forget the loader. We'd just throw them right up there and then ram it in and then, you know, fire them.

DC: Could you lift one of those yourself? You said they were two hundred pounds.

TR: Actually at that time I could.

DC: Wow.

CR: Can you imagine this twenty year old loading two hundred pound bags, firing three, and the noise. And he just asked could you talk in between? I don't think . . .

TR: Oh yes. Oh yeah, we could talk in between. Yeah, we could talk to each other.

CR: >Course, I guess once you do that for a few days . . .

TR: It's just another job that you're doing. Yeah, you can talk with each other.

DC: And how many of these Howitzers would you have? Did you say four?

TR: We had four in our battery.

DC: But if all four were firing three a minute, there wouldn't be many breaks.

TR: Right. Right.

CR: You can imagine his hearing.

TR: You know, and our next battery over, they had six 155 Howitzers, 155 mm. Howitzer, which was, they were about a hundred pound round. And they, you know, so then you got six of them firing and they were all self-propelled, too, so we had quite a fire power around us, you know.

CR: And even when you slept, whatever, I mean they were never away from that noise.

DC: Right. Right.

TR: No, that went on day and night, you know.

DC: So you just had to deal with that.

TR: You just . . .

CR: Went to sleep. You got tired, you went to sleep.

TR: You got tired, you just go to sleep. You know, you don't even hear it.

CR: And I said back in that day, too, as an aside, with all the discussion today about skin cancer and sun screen and everything else, he spent months out in the sun without sun screen, without anything. I mean, he should be a walking . . .you know, skin cancer kind of thing

from what he was exposed to. And you said it was a court marshal offense if you got a sunburn.

TR: Sure.

CR: A court marshal. Because you couldn't do your job.

TR: Anywhere in the army. Not just in Vietnam, but anywhere in the army. You can't do your duty if you're sunburned. [laughs]

CR: Now I don't know how you prevent when you're working, you know.

DC: Well you have to wear your tan and [?] clothes and all that stuff.

TR: Well actually we didn't. You worked without a T-shirt most of the time and all of that stuff. Nobody ever really got burned.

DC: How about bugs?

TR: Bugs weren't too bad. We had some, we had mosquitos and all of this stuff. The worst part was the rats over there. [laughs] And they were that big, those things. They had rats, you know . . .

CR: You had screening around you when you slept.

TR: Well we had mosquito screening where we slept because of the fact that they were bad, you know, and you couldn't sleep unless you had the mosquito net around you. Now some people lost theirs and they didn't get it, they had to sleep without it. I never lost mine. [laughs] I kept mine the whole year.

DC: Were there close calls for you?

TR: There were a few close calls, not too many I guess. We've gotten in convoys where some stuff happened and, you know . . .

CR: You got ambushed.

TR: In the convoy, you know, we had to stop because they had to take a truck off the road or something that got blown up or so, but I myself have been lucky and never had . . .never had really that close. Only once at night that I remember I heard a bullet go right over my head.

CR: You never told me that. You never told me that.

DC: Was that when you were away from the base camp?

TR: Yeah.

DC: Was there a fire fight going on at that time?

TR: No, there were just sniper fire here and there going on. But it was not a big fire fight going on at all. Every once in awhile you heard some bullets going.

DC: It sounds like maybe the riskiest part was transporting things from place to place.

TR: Transporting was the worst part because you were, of course, exposed with all your stuff. So that was, you know . . .and being a truck driver, I did get loaned out for a couple of weeks sometimes to drive ammunition to other places in the field. And sometimes you were the only truck on the road.

DC: So you're driving a huge truck of ammunition and you're the only truck, you didn't have anyone accompanying you.

TR: Right, uh-huh. Exactly.

CR: You did have a guy drive . . .shotgun.

TR: He had a fifty caliber machine gun on the window. He had the window down and put the fifty caliber machine gun on it and that was about it.

DC: So you were pretty vulnerable.

TR: Oh yeah.

DC: What were the roads like?

TR: Actually the roads were mostly, well the main roads were black top and all the other roads were like gravel roads. They really weren't all that bad. The worst road was the road from Saigon to Ku Chi because of all the military traffic on it and they were, you know, they had potholes all over the place. You couldn't go too fast on those.

DC: So you get potholes even without freezing.

TR: Yeah really, you know?

CR: The one good thing you also did when you were overseas, too, when you got your pay, you went and got a money order and sent it home to your mom rather than losing it gambling or whatever. And so you had a down payment on a new car when you came home.

TR: A lot of guys gambled away their paycheck every month.

DC: Just amongst themselves?

TR: Just among themselves, yeah, really. And by the time payday came, well, they owed so much money to everybody that there went the check, you know. Then they started borrowing money until the next one.

CR: And they also had script over there, too. When you did get money you didn't get our money, you got script money. And you said once in awhile they would change the scrip so they couldn't counterfeit it.

DC: Oh, I see. OK.

CR: And they couldn't get their hands on, you know, American cash.

TR: Right. Uh-huh.

CR: But through that whole time, you know, it was only letters. And of course, when your mother got letters, you don't know if he's dead or alive because he might've died yesterday or last week. Sometimes . . .

DC: How long would it take a letter to get . . .

TR: About a week.

DC: A week, that's not bad.

CR: And sometimes when you were out in another camp or that, you know, he wouldn't get mail for a week, two weeks, because they were out on a mission. And then you'd come back and you'd get a bunch of letters. Because you had four or five people that kind of regularly wrote you. And you wrote home once a day or so, when you could.

TR: I wrote, yeah, every other day I wrote my parents, you know. And other people I wrote every once, occasionally, but not every day or every other day.

CR: It's kind of interesting, too, because after we moved into this house; in our attic we were cleaning not too many years ago and I found a bag with letters that he had saved that he had gotten in Vietnam. And I thought, AOh, this is gonna be so interesting!" Maybe five years ago. AI can't wait, tonight we're gonna sit down, I'm gonna get to read all these letters that people wrote you back then!" I took out the first letter . . .it's in Dutch. Almost every letter was all in Dutch. I think there were only three letters in English. So he had to translate all the letters for me.

TR: Because at that time I could write much better in Dutch than I could in English, you know?

CR: And they could, too, your mother wrote in Dutch, your sister wrote in Dutch.

TR: And of course my parents did, too, so everybody . . .so we just wrote in Dutch back and

forth. So I guess if anybody tried to censor our letters they'd say, AWhat's this?!", you know. [laughs]

DC: That's a very interesting point, yeah. And when you translate, you can leave out the parts you . . .

TR: Yeah. Right. [laughs]

CR: The one nice thing, too, when you came home from Vietnam, the one good thing: he knew he had a job when he came home. He knew he could go right back to Pontiac Motors.

TR: Right. That was the nice thing. And I guess that kept me going all the year because I knew once I got back I'd have a job. And a lot of people weren't sure what they were gonna do once they get back home. So that was one lucky thing that I thought . . .I thought at least I had a year in. I didn't know what the limit was, or the minimum or whatever, you know? But I thought, AAt least I got a whole year in at Pontiac Motor", so I'll have my job. Which I did when I came back.

DC: So what was it like coming back?

TR: Well, it was wonderful coming back. [laughs]

CR: Yeah, it was wonderful coming back. I made it! I'm still alive!

TR: I made it, I was . . .you know, I was happy I made it back. I guess my biggest worry while I was in Vietnam was the last few weeks that nothing was gonna happen at that time. And I guess my worst worry was that the plane was gonna come off the ground to get us out of there.

CR: And it was gonna be shot down.

TR: Was it gonna be shot down, because you know, normally when a plane goes well it goes like this. Well, planes in Vietnam, they went like that.

DC: Get out fast.

TR: They got up real fast.

CR: And you knew people had got killed a day or two before they were going home.

TR: Sure, they got . . .yeah.

DC: Did anyone in your unit get killed?

TR: Yeah, a few people in my unit got killed. Not too many. We were lucky, I mean . . .where we were and because of the big Howitzers we were well protected normally. So we were

pretty lucky with that went.

DC: Did you have any idea that that would be the case when they asked you to do Howitzer training?

TR: No. The one thing that I was thinking, you know, in Howitzer training at least I'm not gonna be a foot soldier. You know, because we're not gonna be, you know, sent to the front line. Because with the Howitzer you're not gonna be there, because you gotta be back little bit. Because you don't want those things to run into enemy hands. So at least I thought I was lucky there.

CR: Well when you came back, too, where were you in California that they made a new uniform for you so you could come back with a brand new uniform?

TR: It was at Travers Air Force Base.

CR: And they said, AWe'll process stuff, you can go home for a little while. If you reenlist we'll hurry it up." Well, take as long as you want.

TR: You take your time. [laughs]

CR: You didn't have any problems coming home, though. I mean some of the people that had problems at airports and this sort of stuff with Americans. You never had any of that.

TR: No, I had no problems coming. See I was the earlier part of Vietnam. I mean, from >66 to >67. In fact, it was August 16 to August 16. It was exactly a year from coming and going. But it's, you know, I was early enough. I mean, later on you heard about people getting spit on and all of that kind of stuff. Well, you know, when I came that wasn't the case. And none of the people that I know of had any problems with that. I mean, we just put our uniforms on, they made up brand new uniforms at Travers Air Force Base and we had to wear those to travel home, and so we got our plane tickets and we went.

DC: What did your old uniform look like before they made you a new one?

TR: Well, actually, my old one did look pretty bad. [laughs]

CR: >Course, they weren't your [?] Because you had just work clothes.

TR: We had no dress uniforms at all in Vietnam. All we had was the green fatigues. And of course, the laundry facilities were not the greatest over there and mostly we had the Vietnamese do it. They just did them all by hand. But, you know, for sweat and everything else in them, they were looking pretty raunchy when we came back. So that all got just thrown away.

DC: Is that what you wore on the plane back to California?

TR: Yeah. Because we had no dress uniforms at all, so that's why they made all the dress uniforms, actually, so that when we came back . . .

DC: So the only time you had a dress uniform was for the flight from California back to . . .

TR: That was just for the flight to go home, yeah. That was all it was for. And we were told we had to wear those. So we got put into a new uniform and we went home that way.

CR: >Course, you didn't have much . . .you didn't have many clothes or anything.

TR: I had a small suitcase that had a few civilian clothes in there and stuff, but that was it. But my, I left all my extra fatigue uniforms over there because, you know, for the guys that, you know, AYou want an extra shirt, an extra pair of pants; then take it", you know. Because I'm not gonna use it. So that was what most people did with that stuff, you know.

DC: So was anyone waiting for you at the airport when you . . .

TR: My parents were.

CR: They had a flag on the house and all of that.

TR: Yup. American flag on the house and stuff.

DC: So how long was it after you came back that you went back to work?

TR: Well, it wasn't too long; about two weeks and I was back to work.

DC: Two weeks. What did you do during those two weeks?

TR: Just basically not much. You know, sitting around and I thought, AWhat am I sitting around for?" You know, I wasn't getting any money. So I thought, AWell, I'll just go hire back in, go back to work." And that's what I did.

DC: Did you go back to your old job?

TR: I went back to the same department, but not to my old job. When I came back I had the same foreman that I had, who when I first came to Plant 5, that same foreman was on that line. And so he picked me up right away and so he put me on a job dropping differential cases into the differential, and with the gear and all of that stuff. And so that was about the lousiest job on the line. But I did ok with that.

DC: What made it lousy?

TR: Actually because you had to . . .there's not much room between the gear and the case to hold onto it. And so you had to just with the tips of your fingers you had to do that. And then you had to put gear paint on the stuff after you got it dropped. Well you had to first

press the bearings on there and then you had to put the braces on there, then you had to drop it in there, and put gear paint on there. So I had to do that for every one . . .

DC: Gear paint, did you say?

TR: Yes, it's like . . .it's kind of a grease-paint mixture, is what it is. Because that's how they check out later on to see if the gears are matching up properly. That's what it's for. So I did that and I got pretty good at it and I got, you know, in fact I got real good at it. And later on they were gonna actually [?] . . .>course, then I got hired in on day shift. Well for some reason they put me on . . .then I got bumped to second shift after I think it was about a month. And then they decided to put me back on day shift. I put back in to go on day shift as soon as I could, you know. Well so a couple weeks later I got back on days. And then the other foreman from the other line that I worked when they got the new line started on second shift, he came up to me and got me, you know, because my first foreman was on vacation. So he says, AOh, I want you to work for me." Because he knew I was a good worker. And he put me back actually on my old job that I had before I went in the army. But I didn't care for it then; I kind of liked the job that I had dropping those cases in. Because I got to like that job because I got so efficient at it. I had so much time to do that. You know, whenever they put somebody else on the job, I mean, they were getting behind. They had to go help them out. Which they did with me at first, too, you know. But I got so good at it that I had plenty of time. You know, I could drink a cup of coffee between. You know, take a sip. But I was able to do all of that and I had plenty of time. I could work ahead a little bit, because it was a line that you could walk on. And get them done, and then I could do something else and by the time the job got away from me, I knew how far I could go and I could catch up again, you know. So I was doing really good at it. So when my other foreman came back from vacation that I worked for before, after this guy, the other guy got me; I told him, I said, AI'd like to get back on that job if I could." He said, AOh, OK. Good." And, you know, he liked it. So he had a talk with this other foreman I was working for now and he got me back. They brought me over to the old job. Because he had a guy there that had all kinds of problems doing the job. He was happy that I wanted to come back on my job, you know, because . . .so he said, AI'd love to have you." So he brought me back on the job and I worked there for almost six years on that.

DC: You were in high demand at that point.

TR: I was in pretty good demand, you know, because at times that I wasn't there, then they had somebody else. I can remember one time I was doing . . .they had me do something else and this guy was doing my job for a day. And he was, you know, he had to put that yellow gear paint on there. And he had more on himself, I mean he was full. His whole clothes, everything was so full. Everybody just had to laugh, you know, so then they put me back on the other job. [laughs] How is it possible, you know, to look like this? And I had been working on that job for a long time at that point and of course I was as clean as could be. You know, I didn't get dirty on the job.

DC: So it sounds like there really were techniques that you could . . .

TR: Oh yeah. There were definitely techniques where you could do your job and you had time to do the job then, you know. And of course I liked it when they speed up the line because then they took the gear, the paint job away from me and somebody else had to do it.

DC: Oh, so when they sped it up, they took part of your job off.

TR: Yeah. So that was kind of nice because they brought more people on the line to do that. So when they did that and they took that job away from me, so that made it kind of nice.

DC: So you preferred the dropping in part to the painting part?

TR: Oh definitely. Yeah. You have to just put the bearings on and drop them in. That's all I had to do then, you know, so yeah I'll take that.

DC: That's the part you had mastered.

TR: Right. Uh-huh.

DC: Were there many other Vietnam veterans in the plant at that point?

TR: Yes, there were. But we never, you know, we never really talked about that so much. Basically, because I worked on a line that was in kind of an oval like this place mat. And I was working in this part right here, so I could talk just to the guy . . .in fact, I was right next to the repair station where they, you know, they repaired them if the gears weren't right. And so I talked to those people, basically. But the other people, I was too far away really, to be talking to anybody.

DC: What was it like to be back in the plant after having been in Vietnam?

TR: Oh, it was great to me because I was making a paycheck. I was making a heck of a lot more money than I was doing in the army.

CR: And nobody shooting at you.

TR: Yeah, you know. So I had just a good time. I was working with . . .we had good people at the time. I liked the foreman that I was working, he liked me and so, you know, so that made it good. Even the utility man that we had was, you know, to be getting one pair of gloves that's it, you know, boom. With the job I had I wore out gloves. I wore them the reverse way because where they sewed the parts together on the back, that is how I want it because that gave me extra padding for my fingers with those gears. Because if I wore them the right way it'd be hurting later on. Which I was at first, anyway, but later on, well you get used to it, you know. But at that point, even the utility man later on . . .if he had special nice gloves, he just gave me a whole bundle. He said to me, AToday I got some good gloves for you." You know, ATake those." And so it all got so that the people worked together and you do a good job and people know it and you're OK, you know.

DC: It sounds like there were a number of times when people had kind of a rough first meeting with you and then worked up to . . .

TR: Right. And a lot of times, once they get to know you they know you're a good worker. Hey, you're serious, you're OK. Then people do come around and they say, AI'll help you out." You know, I got some good stuff. Because they knew, because a lot of times I had to give him gloves and say, AI need another pair of gloves because my fingers are all . . ."