Tom and Carolyn Romein Interview, Part II
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The Romein's Home
Clarkston, Michigan
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DC: Alright. Well maybe since you probably are more rooted in the place where we left off than I could possibly be, maybe you can tell me what thoughts were going through your mind as you heard the end of the tape there.

TR: Ok. Of course, we were talking about the gloves and, you know, so from there on I got all the gloves that I needed and no more problems. In fact, I became very good friends with the utility man and I could, if I needed something then it was there, no problem anymore. But I was a good worker and they liked that and so there was no problem, you know, never a problem with any of these people.

DC: See if you can help me get my bearings again; was this 1967 when you came back?

TR: Yeah, this was 1967. I came back in August.

DC: In August, that=s right. Now I run the risk of duplicating some of the stuff that we talked about. It might=ve been just before here. But I=m curious to know when you came back in 1967, were there any differences you could remember between what you discovered in August of >67 with what you left in August of >66?

TR: Not too much, because they had just built a brand new differential line before I left, actually, and I worked on that for a few months. And so when I came back, it was a little dirtier, but other than that everything basically looked the same. You know, since I came back to the same plant, the same department, the same everything, really not much actually had changed. And even the differentials were still exactly the same thing as what they were before.

DC: So the job was essentially the same.

TR: So the job was essentially the same as what I left.

DC: How about the atmosphere in the plant? One thing that comes to mind is that a month before you returned, there were riots in Detroit and all. I wonder if there was any difference in the atmosphere?

TR: Not really, because I guess we=re still far enough away from Detroit. And the thing with the riots in Detroit that was funny because, you know, I had a TV set in Vietnam which I hooked up with probably about twenty extension cords to get all the way out there. And

we were watching the riots in Detroit on TV over there. And we were sitting there saying, "Boy, I=m glad I=m here and not there@, you know? [laughs]

CR: You hadn=t gotten there, [?] Detroit.

TR: So it=s funny, but our relationship in the plant has always been from day one, you know, be a good relationship; be it black, be white, be Mexican, whatever. We never had, save for some individual problems, but basically we all had our families to feed. We were all doing the same jobs. And we were all working side by side. And even after the riots we were still working side by side. We never felt that there was any major problems because of that. We never really had to deal with that in the plant.

DC: This is the first I=ve heard of soldiers watching the riots from Vietnam. I=ve heard of many people in Detroit watching Vietnam in the midst of the riots, but. . .

TR: Right, right.

DC: Yeah, that=s a very interesting perspective.

TR: Yeah, really. Uh-huh.

DC: So how many years did you work, then, with the differentials?

TR: I worked eight years altogether with the differentials.

DC: How many of those years were after you came back?

TR: Actually, that includes, really, the two years in Vietnam. So it=s really been six years; it was five years after Vietnam that I worked.

DC: I realize I would be able to piece together some of that from the previous interview, but I have to get my bearings now.

TR: Yeah, right. Because I worked there until 1972. And that is when I bought in this house, in fact, that we=re still sitting in.

CR: You saved your money from all of that.

TR: I saved my money, plus also they had. . . Plant 5 was kind of dying down. They were losing jobs to other plants. And they were, at the time. . . and I was, they shift a lot of people to second shift, and I was the last person seniority-wise to be on days still. You know, if anybody, the next person to go second shift would=ve been me. So at that point, they were just hiring; they called for a hundred new people in Plant 14. And I had never been in the 14 at that time, but I thought, "Well, they want a hundred people there. I=ve heard there was a lot of overtime in 14.@ So I went right away and I signed up to go to 14.

CR: You bought this house, you needed the money.

TR: Right, I needed the money because I had the house payments now and everything else. And I needed more money. And this was a great way, you know, with the overtime. And I figured that [?] wonderful.

CR: And he was gonna stay on day shift, too.

TR: And I had enough time to be on day shift. Now, the first two weeks I had to go to second shift >cause that=s where the place was at. So I said, AWell, that=s fine.@ So I went to 14 and the first day, right away, I put in a shift preference for days. But you had to wait two weeks to get that, so I worked two weeks in second shift and then I bumped right on days.

CR: The one thing I=d like to add, too, that of course I wasn=t here yet, but the fact that GM gave him credit for the two years that he was in the service towards his seniority was a major item that they were willing to grant him. Which to me was a patriotic thing for GM to do.

TR: Well that=s what basically got me through Vietnam, through the army. Because I knew I had a job when I came back. And, you know, a lot of people that were with me in Vietnam, they had no job to come back to. So they, you know, they just had to come back and see what happens. I knew all I had to do was go back to Pontiac Motor and I had my job. So that was a great thing.

DC: But still in Plant 5 it sounds like that was jeopardized a bit. Fortunately there were other plants in the complex.

CR: Right in the complex.

TR: Yeah. Yeah, there were other plants and even though Plant 5 went down, other plants went up. And that was the nice thing, because they had. . . even the engine plant they had, they were doing great business, and the foundry they had at the time still. And, you know, plus pressed metal; that was, they were booming, in fact, in both 14 and Plant 15.

DC: So was it pressed metal in Plant 14?

TR: 14 is pressed metal. Right, uh-huh. And that is where I went.

CR: That was really a big change, though. I never really saw Plant 5, but all of a sudden now in 14 you were working with *enormous* presses.

TR: Yeah, we worked. . . but you know, it was assembly line in Plant 5 and here I became a press operator. And of course these were, those presses were so huge. I mean, they were like a three story building, practically. And, you know, part of that coming down: just boom! And so you really had to watch out. There were, I think there were about five

people in the plant that had hands missing walking around.

DC: They were still working?

TR: Well, see either GM had to pay >em off for the rest of their life or they just promised >em a job for the rest of their lives until retirement, and that is what they did. They could only do certain things, but they were all walking around the plant and they all had a job in what they could do, you know?

DC: Now how did you learn this job on pressed metal?

TR: Actually, when I first came, well the first two weeks on second shift I worked on the hood line for awhile. But then when I came to day shift I got a job welding the header panels for the 1973 Le Mans at that time. And we just had a little machine, a little [?] set up there. And you get with a hand welder, you had to hand weld all this brackets in there and we had to do so many an hour. And when they found out we could do so many an hour, they said, AOh, you can do this? Well let=s have a few more.@ And, you know, once we got used to all of that we got plenty of time and, well, we upped production a little bit. That is how it went, you know. So pretty soon we went, I think, from fifty to a hundred an hour.

DC: Did you have any change in your equipment when you went from fifty to one hundred?

TR: No, because everybody got to work so fast and so efficiently; and so they just upped and upped and upped.

DC: Did they just keep track of your production or did they actually have someone come and study your job?

TR: They did both, and they had. . . you know, >cause they kept of course, >cause we had to keep track because we only had to do so many in the hour, and then we could take a break. And of course some people go crazy when you give >em a little break. They wanna play cards. So they, you know, they wanted to get it done so fast and so, you know, well, we were able to do it. But, you know, we were really going too fast. I mean, for. . . you know, you really needed that break afterwards. But the company said, AHey, you can. . . look, we can get all these extra parts out of you.@ Until they came to a point where we just couldn=t get anymore out. And so. . .

DC: What was your job like at that point? When you reached that point where you simply couldn=t do any more, what was your job like?

TR: It was just too much. And I guess, because when you=re working so hard trying to get that extra break, and I never agreed with that anyway >cause I didn=t. . . but anyway, but some people just want it. . .

CR: You didn=t play cards.

TR: Yeah, I didn=t play cards either. So, you know, you get to the point where you get to be so exhausted and there=s no way to quit at that point. Now in the end, we just didn=t make production, actually. That=s what happened. So finally we got taken off the job and we got different jobs. And finally I wound up on the hood line, which is where I wanted to be. >Cause we had automatic presses there. >Cause we, you know, we had the bumpers, of course, and we had fenders. And these were all hand operated at that time. Later they become all automated, too. But at this time, boy you had to put actually a heavy bumper into a press and then. . . usually they had a machine, an iron [?] they call it, to take it out and put it on a conveyor. And then the next person had to put it, depending what line, some had two people on the line. And they had some really little presses where you actually had to put. . . one person had to throw the bumper through, and those things were heavy. They were.

DC: How heavy were they?

TR: I would say. . . they might=ve been like fifty, sixty pounds.

CR: Can you imagine doing that forty times an hour for eight hours?

TR: Yeah, you=re trying to do that. I don=t even know what the production was anymore on those, >cause I didn=t work too much on those. But I spent some time on fender lines, where they were, you know, they had to do >em all by hand. And, you know, like you do seventy-five an hour. And, well, you know those fenders were big at that time. And depending on the car line. . .

CR: And sharp.

TR: They could be pretty heavy and, yeah, and pretty sharp.

CR: The steel is sharp.

TR: All the metal that they just cut off by press, that leaves like a razor edge to it. And your glove is gonna get wore out. You gotta watch it. And I=ve got my hands cut a few times because, you know, on those lines. You know, that just happens.

CR: I don=t know, too, if it was that welding because you=ve done spot welding other times. But the clothes that he would wear, a lot of times when he was welding there were all little holes in his clothes.

TR: Sure, because all these sparks fly off this, off the welders. You know, they got all these little black spots on your shirt from welding.

DC: Now did you ever get burned through your shirt?

TR: Yeah. Yeah, that happens, too. You know, because that burned right through it.

CR: The safeguards and protections were really not as good as they should=ve been.

TR: At first when I came there, they really weren=t there. And later on they had the automatic welders, too, and stuff; you just put the parts in there and the part actually moves away behind a screen, or behind like Plexiglas and stuff. And it did all the welding and the sparks were flying on the Plexiglas; so rather than on the person. So they did do a lot to eliminate all the big problems.

DC: Did they eliminate jobs, as well, with those automatic welders?

TR: Yes, they did. Yeah, of course because you figure, even with the little header panel that we had to weld, we had. . . let=s see, I think we had six. I think it was six or eight people on those things working all the time. >Cause. . . no, we had eight people because I think we had four [?], actually, with those same things, and there=s two people on each side. And that is how we got >em out. And later on, well you know, you got just two people actually throwing a part in there. And then the machine does the rest; it brings it back, throws it out, and. . .

DC: So six people are out of there.

TR: So yeah, you know. So that eliminated a lot of people, the automation. >Course, but after all of that I went on the hood line, which were all automated. And we basically had to watch all the parts going down and in the beginning there were a lot of. . . automation was not the greatest because a lot of stuff went wrong and so you always had to be straightening out parts in the die and stuff like that in order to keep it going. And that=s why they needed the men for every press because the thing wouldn=t keep going for more than a few parts and something would go wrong, you know.

DC: So when you say you had to straighten it on the press, does that mean that the metal would go in improperly?

TR: Right.

CR: With a stick, not with their hands.

TR: Yeah. Because actually before, when they first had the automation for the hoods, they had actually a conveyor that just, you know, with the chain belts. And that just kind of pushed it into the die. And depending on the speed that you put, you could slow it down, speed it up, that it would hit actually the end of the die as it fell in, and hope that it falls right. And otherwise you could adjust the speed a little bit, you know, to back it off or to go a little farther so it would actually hit the place. But that would only last so long and that thing would be off again and you=d have to do something else, you know. And so you always, all day long you kind of worked with that stuff trying to keep it, to go in properly.

CR: Also, another part of the big job was the scrap that was cut off. They had no good way for the scrap to disappear. Well if the scrap got in the die, that could be a major down time where they would have to repair; take the die out, repair the die. So they were also in charge of making sure the scrap went in the scrap chute. Then it didn=t damage the die.

TR: And sometimes scrap chute would fill up right to the top and you=d have to shut the line down to get, you know. . . and somebody would have to go down in the basement where all the scrap chutes were and the scrap conveyor, and they had to straighten it all back out there, and then let it all come down. So that was a mess.

DC: How much room was there between these dies?

TR: There were, between the die. . . depending on the press line, but basically there was probably about twenty feet between the dies, between the presses.

DC: And would the scrap accumulate within those twenty feet?

TR: Well, see, the scrap chute itself was very small because that had to go down through the floor down to the basement. And so the scrap chute itself might=ve been eight inches wide and the width of the die, sometimes, you know.

CR: >Cause they were basically small pieces.

TR: But they were. . . well, the die cut it into smaller pieces, [?] what came off, and then just dropped it down the scrap chute. But that=s just gravity, and sometimes. . . if anything, the scrap chute wasn=t made quite right or anything, the scrap would. . . hung up on the scrap chute on some of the metal. The scrap chutes were usually made out of certain different pieces of metal welded together. And if anything was not completely welded down and had a little slit in it someplace, well you know the piece of scrap would go right into that and get stuck, and then the next piece, which builds and builds right up. You know, if you weren=t there quick enough. . . sometimes you were, but you couldn=t get a piece out of there and you=ve got the big mess. Because, you know, if you=re running like two hundred fifty or so an hour of those things, and sometimes we got that many, well the scrap builds up really fast.

CR: And the conveyor belt down below isn=t running or that. . .

TR: Sometimes the conveyor belt below would stop and that thing would just fill right up until it was full. You=d have to send a die maker down to clean it all out. Sometimes they could and some, you know, they could jack the conveyor up a little bit and at least clean the scrap chute so you could fill it up again. Or sometimes they=d have to just pull you off the line because they just couldn=t put any more in.

CR: The other thing, too, that I=d like to add: during this time they were supposed to be able to,

and you could, offer suggestions to the company on how it could be done more efficiently, or how it could be done in a better fashion. Well, over these years, no matter whether you had a good suggestion or you didn=t, the only way. . . because they had a compensation program with it, that they figured out if your suggestion saved >em so much money, then you got paid ten percent of it or five percent of it. But no matter what you had, if you didn=t have a foreman or somebody in management to fight for you, your suggestion was basically thrown in the wastebasket. No matter what. And you were actually told that some of the suggestion boxes emptied into wastebaskets. They were considered, at that point, really robots. You do what we tell you to do, and even though you=re operating the machine, you know what would be good; we don=t care because you don=t know anything. That was really basically the company=s. . .

TR: Company policy there, uh-huh.

CR: And only if you had somebody who was willing to fight for an idea. Even if it was the best idea in the world, it would=ve saved umpteen numbers of dollars, they basically didn=t care. It was kind of during that time, too, when you went to 14, when we started to date. And of course, we only dated a few months. You asked me to marry you, we got engaged, things went very quickly. But after we were engaged, one time, I don=t know where we were coming home from, but I knew he had something he wanted to tell me. Now I was teaching at the time. And it was very important to him. And I had no idea. And he said, A I wanna stop at this restaurant.@ We still know where we stopped; we still remember that day.

TR: Uh-huh. [laughs]

CR: And I wanna tell you something. And, you know, my mind went in a thousand different directions. And you proceeded to tell me, then, AYou must know that in 1970. . .@

TR: 1970. We had the big strike. And I said, you know, that that year, I said, AI didn=t make a whole lot of money because we went on a ten week strike.@ And I said, AJust so you know that these things can happen working for the auto company. Because,@ I said, Awe were on a ten week strike. For ten weeks I made no money.@

CR: And you didn=t qualify for food stamps, you didn=t qualify for anything.

TR: >Cause I was living with my parents at the time of the strike, so of course I didn=t get anything else. I did get some strike pay, of course. That wasn=t a whole lot at that time, anyway. Which it wasn=t meant to be. Just enough to pay for your food, but not to pay bills really, you know.

CR: But he really felt a necessity to tell me, AOk, is this ok with you?@ Well, my reaction at the time, I was, AIt=s no problem. I love you. I=m working. If we have to do with less, we will make it.@ But it was very important to you. And I felt relieved that that=s all it was,

because that wasn=t gonna bother me. I knew enough about the car companies to know that possibility was there. And so then that became not a great issue. I knew we were going to have to work around that. But he felt a necessity to tell me. AAre you sure that=s ok with you?@

TR: Yeah, because that strike hurt most of the workers for a long time because that was a really big. . . that=s the longest strike that we=ve ever had since I worked, you know, all the years I worked for Pontiac. We never had a strike that long.

CR: But they did make major gains. The union made major gains in that strike.

TR: Oh yeah. It was worth it, I mean as far as, you know, because the union did a good job striking because we got a good contract out of it. I think we got the thirty and out. . .

CR: The thirty and out came then. I think that=s what it was.

TR: Because of that, and you know, that was a great thing. I don=t know what else we got anymore, but. . .

DC: Can you remember any of the issues that. . .

TR: I don=t remember the complete issues of that.

CR: I think you had, at that time, to be fifty-five. Your age had to add up. But it was thirty and the benefits that you could retire.

TR: You had to be fifty. . . yeah. Right.

CR: And of course, if you=ve worked in the plant for thirty years picking up fifty pound parts, throwin= >em in, press the buttons, taking >em out, for thirty years, it=s not like you=ve been sitting in an office for thirty years. That=s. . . if you haven=t done that, it=s really hard to imagine day in, day out, of doing the same thing over and over. Of physical labor. And when you=re twenty-five, ok you can do that. As you age, that becomes more and more difficult.

DC: Oh absolutely.

TR: That=s right.

CR: Just had to add that.

DC: Tell me more about how you got by during that strike. What did you do during that strike?

TR: Basically nothing. You know, we. . .

CR: Well you lived with your parents.

TR: I lived with my parents, which was lucky, but of course my dad was on strike, too, because he worked for Pontiac. So they weren=t getting any money. They did get food stamps and they, I guess they got it for me, too, because so many people in the house. But they had trouble paying their bills because, after all, he was only getting the same strike pay that I was getting, but he was getting a little bit more because of my mother and my younger brother was still at home, and myself. So he got for four people, while I got for one. But I didn=t get food stamps, but the strike pay.

CR: I think also, back then (and you can correct me if I=m wrong on that), because the wages were low at that particular time, it was hard to really save ahead and plan for the possibility of a strike. Later on, when the wages were higher, you could plan for a strike. And people who were, you know, if you were a knowledgeable person you kind of planned for the possibility. If you didn=t go on strike then, ok, you had some extra money. But you didn=t just say, AWell I hope we don=t go on strike.@ and not save anything. Of course, you hadn=t been home from Vietnam that long, and with the wages the way they were, you couldn=t really prepare.

TR: Right, so it was a lot harder that time. But like I said, we did make out. Luckily we went back to work just before Christmastime. So that helped. And you know, we got a good contract out of it, too.

CR: It was worth. . .

TR: Well you have to just do it. You have to be willing to do it or else the union is nothing if you=re not willing to do that. And, you know, naturally because of that, I think over the years following, that we got contracts without a major strike because this had hurt the workers but it hurt GM even more. And they were stubborn at the time. But I think they learned a lesson just as much. You know, you can=t be too stubborn or you=re gonna lose, too, and it=s not worth it for either side. So you gotta come together a little quicker than that, you know.

CR: You=ve always said the company has to make a profit, but the company should share some of that profit with the workers. And that=s where you have to find the compromise.

TR: Absolutely. Right.

DC: Did the plant ever make any effort to run during the strike?

CR: With scabs.

TR: No. No, they never did. We, in fact, we ran picket lines out there and stuff. We were out, you know, and we were stopping traffic and harassing the foremen a little bit going in, because they went in every day. And of course they did stuff. But they really couldn=t run

production because they didn=t have enough of >em to do that.

CR: And a lot of >em didn=t even know how to do it.

TR: And a lot of >em wouldn=t know how to do it. So they couldn=t. They were just filling the time in the plant. They were getting paid so they made >em come in. But they told them that if they ever, if they get harassed or they get hurt, not to push themselves in. Just go back home. That=s what they told >em at the time. But I think, like I said, we had a good relationship with most people in the plant and we had a pretty good relationship with most foremen. And so even with that, I mean, everybody knew these foremen had to go to work every day and, you know, we weren=t hard on >em. We just, we were just having a little fun with >em. But they also knew we were coming back in. We knew we were coming back in and working for >em, so we weren=t trying to be nasty. And I don=t think too many people actually did.

DC: Did you distinguish at all between foremen and higher level management? Because on the one hand I hear you talking pretty clearly about how they didn=t take you seriously as people and as thinking people. On the other hand. . .

CR: But that was top management, that was not the foremen.

DC: That=s what I=m asking, yeah.

TR: Yeah. You know, a lot of the foremen were hired in actually as hourly and became foremen later on. And that is how most of >em became a foreman. And even at the time that I got hired in, that was how most of >em were. They worked as an hourly on the line before and later on that became even more so. But, well the higher-up management, there were a few who started as hourly and became a foreman and went up the ladder real quick, you know, they went to college and so on. I know some general foremen that did not go to college either, and today that=s unheard of anymore. But yeah, a lot of >em came up in the ranks as an hourly and then became foremen and some even became plant manager who actually started as an hourly employee. But most of the higher up, they were hired in as a salaried worker. And some of these people, they were, AYou=re an hourly worker, you=re nothing. You=re just a piece of scum@, you know. And there were that attitude and those were obvious. You know, those were very obvious.

CR: Also during the strikes, and I=m sure it was that strike, too, the foremen were happy that they were on strike. They were glad they were on strike. Because for years, and I don=t know if it=s today, but for years they wanted the union to win more benefits and to win more things because they knew if the union got it, they were gonna get that and even more.

TR: Right.

CR: So they were really happy that they were on strike. Because it meant that they were gonna

get more.

DC: Ok. >Cause the company couldn=t let the blue collar workers earn more than salary.

CR: Right.

TR: Right. And they even told us that, even while we=re on the picket line, but also even later on. They said, AI=m glad you struck, you stuck out for more money, because we=re getting more money, too!@ [laughs]

CR: And even better.

TR: In their cases, even better. Now later on that changed, when things were going the other way at GM. But that was much later on. That foremen didn=t get quite as much as the hourly person did because the only way that GM could cut cost is by salaries, and because the hourly were under contract. . .

CR: But that=s probably more in the >90's now.

TR: That=s more in the >90's, what we=re talking about here, you know?

DC: Did you even notice any tension between the foremen and their higher level, their superiors?

TR: There was. And I know there was, because I know my foreman had tension with his higher superiors. You know, he=s had problems with them. And I=ve had, even as hourly sometimes, tension with the higher-ups rather than the foreman himself. And now, you know, they couldn=t say too much because by contract they=re supposed to tell my foreman if they don=t like it, and my foreman=s supposed to go to me. And sometimes, you know, they did that, too. Well, sometimes the foreman said, AWell, they said that you couldn=t do this; you couldn=t sit there and read your magazine while the line was down. And I=m supposed to tell you that. But don=t worry about it.@ Because the foreman is, you know, he=s the one that you=re working with and you=re working for every day. He doesn=t want you to really get mad at him and start doing something that=s gonna cost him his production or anything else, just because some higher-ups said, AWell, you=re supposed to harass your employees a little bit more.@ And that is basically what it came down to.

CR: And that basically did. The foremen were really, had really kind of a tough job because they had to work with the people on the floor, but they also had to listen to these people coming out of their office once in awhile saying, AOh, the line is down. Don=t let that person read. Go pick up a broom and sweep the floor. Don=t have him doing that.@ Well if the line is down, you know, what=s so bad about somebody picking up a newspaper or that, rather than quick giving >em another job? But if the line starts to run, they can=t run

around and say, AOh, you know, you gotta come back to your. . .@ I mean, you have to be there. And some of the hassles that you went through with some foremen and from general foremen about when it=s quitting time; the line is shut down and you can=t stand at a certain spot to check out. You have to stand twenty feet away from the clock.

TR: Can=t line up at the clock. You had to be so many feet away from the clock. And they had, you know, well the general foreman had your foreman standing by, make sure that you didn=t get too close to the clock until the whistle blew and all of that stuff. I mean, it=s just dumb stuff, you know? And they did. . .

CR: Aggravating stuff.

TR: Aggravating stuff. They did finally go away from that. I even had a. . . I had a foreman, a guy who used to live here. He=s dead now, but he was out there and I was standing right across from the clock on the line. And he said, AYou can=t stand there! You gotta go there!@ He thought he was. . . you know, he was a little guy and he thought he was a big shot, you know. I said to him, I said, AMy general foreman said we could stand over here.@ AOh that isn=t true!@ I said, AWell ask him, he=s standing right there.@ So he actually went over there and it was ok, you know. [laughs] I guess he just told him, ADon=t worry about it. Go back to your business.@ So that kind of ended that whole deal. That general foreman that we had on that particular job there, he was a pretty, he was a good guy.

CR: You had some really nice foremen and nice general foremen.

TR: I=ve worked for a lot of nice foremen, a lot of nice general foremen in the place. They had really, really good people. And again, I was always there, I never took time off.

CR: You did your job.

TR: I did my job. And they knew it, and if I needed something then it got there, too. And because it=s, you know, it=s mostly treat others how you want to be treated yourself. And I=ve always followed that, you know, in the plant with my foremen, with my general foremen. And basically they did the same for me. You know, and they=re all human, too, they all had a job to do. And everybody, we realized that, and they did the same. And if I needed to go on a different job because the line was down, ok. A lot of times we got the whole line out there with no job to do, so that other foremen came around there. And I would usually be one of the first pick. We had some other people who were just like me; they would do the job no matter where you were put. And so that is what we got paid for, I felt. Didn=t always like to be taken to another job because that takes you out of your comfort zone and that is not always nice, you know? But we did it.

CR: Well after we were married we used to always (as a little insight into family life), we would always sit and have a cup of coffee when he came home from work. And some wives were, unless something exciting happened, well, never talk about work. I was always

interested in, AWhat happened today?@, and the little things. AWho did you talk to? What happened? Did the line run well? Did you make production?@ Just generally. So I got a lot of insight into a lot of people in the plant that I actually never met, but I got to know as far as what kind of people they were, how they treated you, how they treated other people. And, you know, there were some very, very nice ones. And then there were some other people who over a period of time when he had somebody different. . . I mean, I knew every day he came home agitated and irritated, because they were doing everything to really try to throw a kink in the whole thing. Accomplishing nothing, but making the day miserable. And, you know, there was no necessity for it. The other thing with that, because for a long time then if they told you you had to do something. . . and I appreciated probably in the first year we were married, you got me into the plant on a visitor=s pass. And when I saw those huge presses and to come down and *boom* and up and *boom* and up, I was so glad that he was conscious about safety, that he would not do anything that he thought was not safe. When foremen told, and that happened, bypass the safety guards. You know, AJust go in and take care of that. Just go in the die and do this.@ You never did that. Because you had no chance; if something recycled or that. And sometimes it did happen where a press recycled. If you didn=t have the guards in there, and people were killed. And I was so happy when I saw because, you know, that was massive. And you would have no chance. So I was always pleased that you would not do anything that you felt would endanger your life.

TR: I=ve had presses recycle on me. You know, you got ready to. . . especially those little fender presses that they had. You know, you cycle the thing and you=re ready to take the thing out and suddenly it comes down again! And whoa!

DC: Would you have any warning?

TR: No, you had no warning whatsoever. That just happens. Then you call the maintenance people over there and take a look at it. Sometimes it never happen again, but for whatever reason, that thing. . . and so you really have to watch it. You know, you gotta slow down on it because you don=t wanna get your hands in there too fast and having that thing come down on you at the same time.

CR: So you really had to be alert. You had to be awake. You had to know exactly what you were doing.

TR: So you just wait until it stops, and then you take that fender out and put another one in. And for the rest of the day I just waited til that thing stopped. I just told the foreman, you know, after they checked it out and everything was ok, I said, AThat=s the way it=s gonna be for the rest of the day. I=m gonna wait til that thing stops before I put my hands here to take it out.@ Well they can=t say anything. That=s ok, you know.

CR: It=s almost like the double look you have to take when the light turns green, that nobody=s going through the red light. It=s almost that same kind of situation.

TR: Right. Because it happened once, you=re not gonna, you know, when you=re on that same press. I have been put on a press at some times where I knew that that press was not working, was not safe, and they just move people off and then they put us on there and say to run it. And I refused. I said, AI=m not running that press. I don=t care what you do, but I=m not running that because it=s not safe.@

CR: And you did have one foreman that I remember that actually told you that one time higher ups told him to put a crew on a line and he said, AI know it=s not safe. I=m not putting you on there.@ A foreman who took that. . .

TR: The foreman, yeah, who took the liberty. Said, AHey, I=m not putting my people on that line. Because I don=t want people to lose their hands on my line@, you know.

CR: And this was before they really were supposed to do that.

TR: Right.

DC: He took a stand.

CR: Took a stand for his people. He liked his people. He didn=t want his people to get hurt. And he said, AI=m not doing that.@

TR: Right. So that. . .

CR: But that was not, you know, upper management. That was somebody, again, that was working.

TR: Well we had, you know, like I told you we had five people walking around with a hand missing and that all happened before I actually came to Plant 14. But I was told that they were all working for the same foreman when that happens. And I had worked for that foreman before, so I know that a lot of that is true, what I=d been told.

CR: And those are those days when you came home and you weren=t too happy about the day.

TR: No. And this is the foreman that made people go into a die even though the press was still on, was not locked out, was [?], and he made >em go in there and clean it out and everything else. And that is how they lost their hands. In fact, that foreman. . .

CR: I know what you=re gonna say.

TR: He was on second, he was not on my shift at the time that it happened, but that foremen actually. . .

CR: Later.

TR: Later on, a few years later, he. . . something was wrong with one of the welders on the hood line; it was an automatic welder. And he went in there and he didn=t lock it out either, and he went in there to straighten out the part, and it cycled while he had his hand in there. And he actually, it chopped off his thumb right there. I heard everybody cheered when it happened. Because of the fact that he made everybody do that before. And those five people who lost their hands in the dies, and one I know in a welder also like that. That was because of him. He made >em go in there without locking it out. And so I guess everybody thought, you know, well finally he got paid back.

DC: When was that?

TR: That was in the late >70's when that happened.

DC: Ok. That=s the same guy.

TR: Yeah, same guy. And he retired shortly after that. But he, well he just went to first aid, went to the doctor, he got his thumb closed off and that was it. He was back to work two days later. And I guess he was [?] to it himself.

CR: It=s also interesting, too, because in >73 we got married, we built the garage. In >74 he put this addition on. And our plan was in >75 we were going to take a trip to Europe. I had never, well I=d been to Europe in >73 for a short vacation, but since he=s from the Netherlands we really wanted to go before we had children. Because we knew once we had children we probably couldn=t afford to go. So in >75 we made plans to go to Europe. Well, of course, the Arab oil embargo was in >75. And you came home in the spring and said, AI am probably gonna get laid off. What do we do? Do we go to Europe? What do we do?@ I said, AI=m still teaching. If we don=t go now, we may not be able to go.@ And he said, AYeah, but I may be laid off.@ I said, AAgain, we=ll make due if you are laid off.@ And I sort of said to you, AWe need to go. You put in for the time for that.@ Well then he came home and said, AI think I have enough seniority,@. >Cause you had like ten years then. AI think I have enough seniority. I=m not going to be laid off, but I=m going to be put on second shift.@ Well, with my teaching schedule during the day, and you=re working second shift, I decided, AI think we=re gonna have to eat dinner at 2:00 in the morning, is the only time I can have dinner together.@ And how do I get mentally prepared for teaching all day and then going to sleep or whatever and then getting up and cooking a big meal at 2:00 in the morning and then, you know, how will we plan this? And you really thought that was going to happen, and I was trying to get psyched to do that. Well, that never did happen. He had just enough time in, and in fact, you got permission to go from your foreman, >cause you took like four weeks off.

TR: Well actually I did, because I told my general foreman, I told I needed to go. . . >cause that was [?], you know, I had different jobs at the time because of the oil embargo we were, they laid off a lot of people. And so today I was working for this foreman, tomorrow I=m working for a different foreman. And every day I was working for a different foreman, you

know. So I wanted this five week vacation and I wasn=t entitled to a five week vacation. I only had four weeks, really. But I talked to my general foreman and he said, AYou can have the five weeks.@ But first I talked to a foreman and they said, AWell, I don=t know. I will see.@ And so finally, two days before I went on vacation, or I think that was the last day that I worked, I went to the general foreman that I worked for and I said, ATomorrow I=m going on vacation for five weeks. Nobody gave me permission to do so yet. You know, everybody is pushing the. . . >Well I don=t know= and this.@ I said, AI got the plane tickets. I=m leaving tomorrow.@

End of Side A, Tape I

Beginning of Side B, Tape I

DC: Let me just take a little digression here. >Cause I remember you mentioned way back when, the other day, that one of the things, Carolyn, that brought you to Michigan was the. . . I think it was the. . .

CR: The salary. MEA.

DC: Yeah. So can you give me. . . [phone rings] Oh, go ahead and get that. Wouldn=t you know it. Maybe I=ll just pause. I was wondering if you could tell me a bit about your trip to Michigan, how you got to Michigan.

CR: Ok. I was going to graduate from Whittenburg and at that particular time I talked to a professor, in fact my advisor, and I was kind of trying to decide: do I go back to Euclid, which is a suburb of Cleveland, to teach; do I go someplace else, what do I do? And my advisor said, AIf you go home to teach, everybody=s going to think you=re still the little girl that you were when you grew up.@ She said, AIf you want to go back to your hometown, go a couple years later.@ So I decided I wanted to find someplace that was far enough away from home that I could be independent, but still if I wanted to go home for a weekend, I could. Having grown up near a large city, I wanted to go near a large city. I investigated, really, Michigan >cause I had heard that MEA was starting negotiations, teacher salaries back in >67 were not that good, and that Michigan was on the move for that. And the Detroit area was far enough away so I could be independent, but close enough that if I wanted to go home for a weekend, I could. I interviewed. . . and the one thing, I knew no one in Michigan, but I had a girlfriend in school that also wanted to go, and we were gonna go together to Michigan. And at that time, because I was really born (so were you) just before everybody came home from World War II, so the glut of like baby boomers hitting jobs and hitting that was not quite there yet. So we started to interview at some places in Michigan. And they really were anxious to hire teachers. But the girl that I was coming with did not do her student teaching yet, and there were a few districts that would not interview us because she had not done her student teaching. And

it=s interesting because we went to one district in Michigan and they must=ve offered us a job three or four different times, and we really weren=t happy there. And then we checked out Farmington and, amazingly enough, all we had to do; we went and we met the director of elementary education. They sent us out to a school to look at, both of us went to different schools, and when we came back we told them we liked it very much and we=ll think about it and we=ll let you know. But I did see on the table contracts with our names on it. Now, of course, today you would never do that. But we said, AWe=ll let you know.@ Well, we talked about it then later and contacted them and so we signed the contract and came to Michigan. And the first day that we were supposed to go to work, we were maybe going to be on strike >cause they had a big meeting about whether we were actually going to work. And I remember I was a little nervous at the time because I couldn=t wait to start teaching. I was so excited about actually having a classroom and here I might be on strike. But at the meeting it had all been settled, so we started to work. And of course, my salary went up a considerable amount from what I had agreed on because of the new contract. So that=s kind of why I came to Michigan. But it was partly because the union movement was having an increase and I really felt teachers were underpaid at that time, and the union was going to be able to do something for.

DC: What grade were you teaching?

CR: I started teaching in sixth grade. I had originally requested fifth grade, but I got a sixth grade class. And at the time they had another, a fella, that came and he got. . . he was draft age, and of course he got drafted. He had to leave in the middle of the year, again, he ended up in Vietnam. So that era, they were really needing teachers all over. So it was wonderful that we could kind of have our pick of where we wanted to be. And we were welcomed with open arms. The stories, when I tell people they had contracts sitting on the table with our names on them, and we told >em we=ll think about it, today is unbelievable. And even a couple of years after that, the whole situation changed. But I found with the MEA, my opinion of it was kind of like with your union, you paid these people, you paid your dues, they were there, they were negotiating, and as long as they were winning you benefits, increased pay, whatever, our dues were really immaterial. Plus, if you had a problem they would back you. And I never really had a problem until 1973 when his brother was going to get married in France. And it was during the time when they were hijacking planes to Cuba, and I asked for the time off. I needed like two days before Christmas vacation and two days after to get the charter flight that your family was going on. Well, there was a lot of hassle over that and my principal wasn=t really so interested. And I went above to my department head and he said, ANo problem. You won=t get paid for those days, but go ahead, have a wonderful time.@ >Cause I had asked them, AIf I don=t get official permission and I just don=t go to school, will the union back me?@ And they said, AThat=s a kind of sticky situation. You really oughtta get permission from somebody.@ And the funny thing was that we went to a wedding that this department chairmen that was over my principal, we saw at this wedding and he had never met Tom. And that was the following summer >cause your brother got married in December. When I introduced Tom to him, the first thing he said, AI let her go! I let her go!@ >Cause I

wrote a tear-jerker of a letter to him before I went to talk to him about the fact that if they didn=t let me have those couple of days, I mean, we might end up in divorce because they expected me to go and all kinds of things. So the union, for me, won benefits and they were there. I never really had any problems with the principals that I worked with. And after two years teaching sixth grade, I had been studying, >cause I got a master=s from U of M in being a reading specialist. And I knew the government was providing funds, and I knew Farmington had a position for a reading specialist. But I had had my first year a very good class and then the second year I had kind of a not so good class. And I was really looking forward to that third year of having kind of a regular class. I really didn=t want to move into being a specialist too soon. So I purposely did not apply till I knew somebody else had applied for this position, so that they of course took this other person. But then in August I got a letter saying they got more government funds and they offered me the position and I figured, AI have to take it if I want it.@ So I never did get that third year. But the union, you know, they were there for us in the teaching profession and I really think they elevated that and did a lot of good things.

DC: So where did you two meet?

TR: We met in the. . . since I was an immigrant, you know, I belonged to an international supper club in Detroit, which was part of the International Institute. And they took fifty percent foreign born people and they took fifty percent American born people. And so that is why I wound up there through my brother first.

CR: You probably joined in, like, >68? >69?

TR: I joined after, >67.

CR: >67. After Vietnam.

TR: In the winter of >67 is when I joined. And then later on, that is where she wound up through a girlfriend.

CR: And that=s the funny part of the story: a girlfriend of mine belonged to this organization that met at the Detroit Institute?

TR: Detroit Institute, uh-huh. International Institute.

CR: Yeah, the International Institute. And she got me to go there. And we used to take turns riding places. And it was, if anybody in the supper club bought a house or moved into an apartment with a party room, they always had a party. So one night she called me up and she said, AThis fella=s bought a house. Do you want to go to this party?@ And I said, ASure.@ Well it was my turn to drive. So I drove out here. And I kind of knew who you were, but that night this house. . . of course it ended here. Was full of people. And I was amazed because I thought, AWow, this fella has curtains on the walls! Pictures on the walls!@ I mean, I had been to some apartments where there were beer cans piled up and

this. But this seemed like a house, and to this day I can remember sitting in that chair in the front, by the front window, looking back. He was dating somebody else at the time. And I thought, AIf I only could be so lucky.@ Because I was like twenty-seven, twenty-six. To meet somebody like him, wouldn=t it be wonderful? Never ever *dreaming* in my wildest dreams that things were going to happen. That was in February. He and his brother went out west and I went out with another teacher friend in the summer, and we kinda talked a little bit. And you said you were actually kind of looking for us out west. I was really looking for you. But then in August he asked me out. And in October you asked me to marry you and we got engaged in November and then we got married in the following June. So, of course, we were older. He had his life, he had his job, he had the house. I had my job; I taught for six years and I had my apartment and we were all settled and it just kinda. . . kind of meshed together. So, and I said I had more schooling than he, but of course he had the schooling in Europe which was really better than schooling here. So we always kind of kidded because we got along. Either he was smarter in school and I [?] in school, because we never had a problem. But we could both see, even though we came from different backgrounds from, you know, the Netherlands and the U.S., and his speaking Dutch and that, we both appreciated the backgrounds that we were coming from and the positions. Because somebody had told me when we were engaged, a friend of mine had said, AAre you sure you want to keep going with him? He did not go to college.@ And I thought, AI don=t think that bothers me. I=m having the time of my life. This is wonderful! I=ve dated people that have graduated from college and they aren=t anything like he is.@ But I thought, AI should make sure this is ok.@ So the next week, everybody that I met and told >em about him, the first thing I said was, AAnd he didn=t go to college.@ And no one blinked an eyelid. And I thought, AHey, this doesn=t bother me. What am I doing this for?@ And so that was not an issue. But I did enjoy hearing about the auto plants. I did enjoy knowing what he was doing. I did enjoy what was happening. And you asked me the same thing when I came home from school: AHow was school today? Did you have any kids that you finally helped to read?@ This sort of thing; we shared our lives together. And it, really all the time has been fun. I enjoyed going to open houses when they had, seeing what was going on in the plant. I know a lot of our friends, the wives were not interested. But to me, that was our future and that was what we were planning for. And after >75, then, when we came back, that=s when we decided we wanted to start a family. And then I got pregnant and I remember the day that I thought I might be going into labor. You always called me at lunchtime. >Cause once I got pregnant, I had taught ten years, and Michael was born in September. So over the summer he always called me, whenever I was home. You always called me at lunchtime and we talked at lunchtime. And I said, AYou know, I think I might be going into labor. Please come home.@ And you asked and they wouldn=t let him come home. So then you called back and said, AThey won=t let me come home.@ I said, ATell >em you=re sick. Tell >em you=re sick.@ And then they let you come home. And of course, I went into labor. We went to the hospital then. And that was kind of. . . kind of a. . . I couldn=t believe they wouldn=t let him come home. When your wife may be ready to have a baby and they tell you, AYou can=t come home.@

DC: One thing that came to mind. . . it=s related, but you talked about how loud the press was and how big it was and all that. How did it compare to the Howitzers that you were blasting in Vietnam?

TR: Well, yeah, it compared pretty good. Of course the Howitzers were pretty big, too, and the noise. . .

CR: You did have hearing protection. . .

TR: What?

CR: Did you ever have hearing protection in Vietnam?

TR: Well, we had it but we didn=t use it. And basically, I mean. . . we came in the United States here, they gave us earplugs when we first came to the, you know, with the Howitzers there. And that is all we=ve ever had, you know, we never got earplugs again. So that is when they gave them to you. Wanna use them, well fine, you know. Most people never did use >em. I don=t even know if I had >em in Vietnam anymore or not because they were given in the States long before I went to Vietnam. So who knows what ever happened to those. But when we were there, we never used any of them. We were never made to use or told to use, whatever.

CR: But in the plant you were.

TR: But in the plant, well. . .

CR: Not maybe in the beginning.

TR: Well, just. . . in the beginning, well, it was just before I left Plant 5; that is when they started to fit everybody for earplugs. Because you never got >em before. And so when I went to Plant 14 I had a set of earplugs and I have wore them always. We always had safety glasses from day one. I got hired in, we got safety glasses. And once I had my seniority, then I could get prescription safety glasses, which was nice >cause the clip-on things were really heavy.

CR: And you wore steel-toed shoes, too.

TR: No, that was optional.

CR: Oh, that was optional. But you always did.

TR: I always did, because well, see, you had to buy your own shoes. If they made you wear steel-toed shoes, they would have to provide >em. So they never made you do it. Otherwise they would have to pay for >em. So they didn=t want to do it. They did want you to wear sturdy shoes, of course, and you were not allowed to wear open-toed shoes and

all of that kind of stuff. But they could not quite actually make you wear the shoes with steel toes in them because they would actually have to provide >em for you. But I always bought >em. I always bought those. And, you know, it saved me a few times when I dropped something on my shoes, but never cut my toes, at least, off. So with that I was good.

CR: Because again, you=re dealing with all that sharp steel.

TR: Well, with sharp steel and with weight even in Plant 5. I mean, those differentials, those carriers were heavy. And if you drop it on your foot, you=re gonna be hurting for awhile. So I always felt that I should have the safety shoes. And they sold >em in the plant. They said they sold >em cheaper than what you could buy outside. I don=t know, maybe so, maybe not. But I always felt good about wearing them and so I always did.

CR: And I felt good about it, too.

TR: And they were good shoes. They did last for quite a long time. So they were good.

CR: But we did, speaking about strikes, you knew every so many years. . . and of course they talked about the. . . what=s the word I want? Which company was gonna be the strike target.

TR: The target, yeah.

CR: You kind of knew which was gonna be the target. So we as a family always planned to have set aside, because you kind of knew, we set aside some money in case you were gonna be on strike.

TR: Right.

CR: And, you know, you went on short strikes. You never went on a long strike like that.

TR: No, we were lucky after that. It=s like I said earlier, I think GM learned from that, too, and so did everybody else. It=s ok to go on strike for awhile, but you don=t want to hurt the company, either, you know, too [?].

CR: But we did prepare for that. We always planned in case. And if they picked another company, oh good, we could breathe a sigh of relief. But we always made provisions; where sometimes on TV you would see, you know, the first week and they didn=t have any food to eat. Well you knew the possibility was coming for that. And of course, the other thing that I liked and the last several years you didn=t have it, was changeover time. Was always nice because there was going to be some vacation time in there. And a lot of our non-auto worker friends used to say, ABoy, you qualify for unemployment, you qualify for sub pay. You get ninety-five percent of your salary.@ But it always used to kind of make me feel bad because he paid money into the sub fund. The sub fund was financed by the

workers to get you over that gap. Well, now they had those two week automatic shutdowns. But in the past, sometimes you=d be off for a month, sometimes you=d be off six weeks. I mean, we never knew. Well if you=re not, if you=re just getting sub during that time or just unemployment and not sub, you know, that=s a long time to go. And you never knew. It was up to the company how they were going to work that.

DC: When would they let you know when work was going to resume?

TR: Usually they would tell you already beforehand, you know, for layoffs they would tell you that we=re gonna be laid off from this date to that date. And sometimes you=d get a certified letter in the mail that says, AYou=re supposed to come back a week early.@, or sometimes they give you another week or whatever, two, you know. They usually give you time.

CR: So I always liked it. I always said we had a trial retirement over these. And every two or three years you got more than a couple weeks off. So we would use that in the summertime to vacation, to go places, to do things. We had a trailer, we went camping. Again, not spending a lot of money (because we didn=t have a lot of money), but still vacationing with the trailer. The boys could be outside. So this was, and I always hated to see him go back to work. We enjoyed each other, it was a wonderful time. And you always took, if they had inverse layoffs. . . you can tell him better than me.

TR: Yeah, you know, because a lot of times, well because of seniority; if a plant shut down or they just didn=t need as much work, they were gonna lay off. . .

CR: Or they were changing the line, which could take weeks, too.

TR: Yeah, changing a press line or whatever. They said, AOk we need to lay off ten people or twenty people@, or whatever. But it=s temporary, so we go by inverse seniority. So that means the higher seniority can get the layoff if they want to. And you could sign up for that and I usually did. You get ninety-five percent of your pay, that=s your take home pay, that is. It=s about eighty percent, really, of what your normal pay is. But that=s a nice vacation time off. So I always signed up for it. And usually I got that time off.

CR: But you also did *always* work all the overtime.

TR: Oh, absolutely. When I was there. . .

CR: I mean, we needed the money. And of course, the money at time and a half or double time.

TR: Any time they offered it, I worked. [?]

CR: So for years I took care of the kids, I ran errands, I did everything. And I said sometimes. . . I mean, you had wanted to be an electrician. You did not have algebra in school, and he took an algebra course at Pontiac, at Pontiac High School. You passed that. And then he

could=ve become an electrician but he didn=t want to because then he would=ve been working seven days a week, twenty-four. . . well, not twenty-four hours a day. And so you didn=t want to do that. But now he worked all the overtime. And so I got used to, if he was working twelve hour shifts seven days a week, I mean he had to come home, eat, and go to bed so he could get up in the morning. And this day after day after day. But I did make one rule. And Pontiac must=ve known my one rule. Because I said, AYou may work seventeen days in a row. . . sixteen days. But the seventeenth day, you are sick.@ Because you saw a lot of people who worked all the overtime and, I mean, tempers flared. It was too much. So I said, AThat seventeenth day, I don=t care if it=s a Saturday, Sunday, a Wednesday, you are sick. Just so you can sleep in, you can change your routine.@ And Pontiac must have known because several times he got close to that sixteenth, seventeenth day, and then he had a day off. I think only maybe once or twice we used that rule. Because I said, AYou need a change of pace. Enough is enough.@ >Cause of course it was cheaper for the company to work the people overtime rather than hire more people. Because then they had to pay >em benefits. And to some extent that=s great for the overtime and the money, but they really didn=t care; is it really getting to the workers? Do they need some time off? Some time back in there in one contract, maybe you=ve heard about these, were personal. . . or what do they call those?

TR: They were. . .

CR: Paid personal holidays! PPH days. Paid personal holidays.

TR: PPH days, yeah.

CR: When they had to take that day off. I think they were scheduled, I forget now. It was only for, like, maybe two contracts. But those days, if you didn=t take those days off, you didn=t get paid. You *had* to take those days off.

DC: Oh really?

TR: You had to take >em off, yeah.

CR: And it was wonderful! Because if you were working massive overtime, you knew you were gonna have that day off. You didn=t have to be sick, you didn=t have. . . you had to take that day. And it was wonderful. Normally in a year if you=re only working five days a week, you don=t need PPH days. But when you=re working seven days a week, twelve hours a day, that PPH day was like wonderful. And, you know, they did away with that then, but it really in a way was, I think, detrimental to the workers.

DC: To take it away, you mean?

CR: To take it away. And the union, of course, negotiated something else for that. And I don=t remember what it was. But for people working massive overtime. . . and at that time you were, and a lot of people were working that.

TR: It was really nice to get a day off like that, that you had to take.

CR: That you had to take. Because you worked all the overtime, but he always took all of his vacation time. Because we needed a break. The family needed a break. *You* needed a break.

TR: To back up a little bit here, I did. . . the school, I went to Pontiac Northern School and I took Math 1 and 2 there because after I [?], found an application for electricians for an apprenticeship. And they said, they came back and said, AWell, you have to have algebra and geometry, or geometry,@ they said, Awith a C average.@ So I said, AOk.@ Well, I didn=t have that. So I went to Pontiac Central and I took Math 1 and 2. My math wasn=t the greatest thing in school. And after I had that for a year. . .

CR: But you got A=s in it, too.

TR: Then I went to Waterford Kettering High School, and that is where I got the geometry and algebra. And I got A=s in all of that at that time. But after that, I felt, you know, if I=m gonna be electrician now, that would be nice, would be wonderful. Get skilled trade pay and everything else. But I=m going to spend the next twenty years on second shift. And I decided I don=t want that. I have a decent job. I work on the press line; I have a pretty good job. So I thought, AIm just gonna stay where I am.@ And now I could, you know, and I know I would=ve been hired as electrician because I had the proper paperwork now. But I thought, AI don=t wanna spend the rest of my life on second shift.@

DC: So there were plenty of people with high seniority in skilled trades on first shift? Is that the problem?

TR: Right. Because the seniority, of course, the higher seniority=s were all on first shift. And I know, for the first ten to twenty years, [?] I wasn=t willing to give up day shift because of that. And I decided I=m just gonna say where I am rather than risk getting. . . because in the evening is when the parties were there, the fun stuff. . .

CR: Well, our boys. . .

TR: And of course we had our boys came home from school in the afternoon, of course, and so on. And I would never see our kids practically if I was on second shift. So I thought, ANah, I can=t do that.@

DC: Did you see them much when you were working that much overtime, too?

TR: Well, see, even though I worked overtime, usually I might work an hour overtime during the week. Or mostly I worked Saturdays and not that many Sundays. So I was, I saw >em in the evenings always, anyway, and I saw >em on Sundays most of the times. It was later, much later that we started have to work on Sundays, too. But being on day shift, I saw

>em in the afternoon always anyway.

CR: The other nice thing about that was he would start at five or six o=clock in the morning, 6:30. So even if he worked, I mean, if you worked your regular shift, you=d be home at 3:00. 3:30. Or if he worked overtime he=d be home at 4:00, 4:30, 5:00, 5:30, for twelve hours. So he was still home. And it really worked out well for us because he needed less sleep than I did. So he would get up in the morning, you know, even when I was teaching, when I wasn=t teaching. He=d come home at 3:00, 3:30; we had a lot of the day left. And you always looked nice going to the plant. I mean, you wore blue jeans and a shirt, he always looked nice. But after being in the plant all day long. . . he came home, took a shower, and he dressed up. He=d put khaki pants on, a nice shirt. I mean, he had been in blue jeans all day; now he=s ready to go. Whether we went shopping, whether we took the boys to the beach, whatever we did, which was wonderful for me because so many fellas (and you might do that), you=re dressed up all day and then you wanna go home and lay around in blue jeans and that sort of thing. And, you know, your wife said, AYou wanna do something?@ ANo, I=ve been working all day, I don=t wanna.@ You always came home, you were ready to do things. And dressed up. It was wonderful!

TR: And even today I will not wear blue jeans because. . .

CR: They=re work clothes.

TR: That is what I use for work. If I have to lay under a car or something, I=ll dig out my old blue jeans and I=ll wear those. But other than that I won=t wear >em because those were my work clothes. You know, to me right now, I don=t wanna wear work clothes.

CR: And that sort of in a way carried over to our boys as they were growing up; you have school clothes and you have play clothes. And when you go to school you wear nice clothes because this is your job to do and to study and whatever. When you come home, you change to play clothes and then you can run around outside or this sort of thing. And it was kind of. . . so, to me, I was excited because, you know, I had him home a lot. We could do a lot of things. Where my dad growing up, he came home 5:30, 6:00. My mother had dinner on the table, and then it was practically bedtime. So it was, I mean, I liked that arrangement.

TR: And I did, too.

CR: Even though I missed, you know, Saturdays and Sundays when he was gone at work.

DC: Did you continue to teach after your son was born?

CR: No. No. After our first son. . . there was, I had a master=s degree, I had my ten years, and I had paid some into the retirement because at that time you had to contribute part of it. And what do we do? And he said to me, AIt=s very easy to make kids. It=s a lot harder to rear kids. I want you home.@ People told me at school, AYou are crazy for giving up your

position. Because now who=s gonna hire somebody with a master=s degree with ten years experience? You will never get another job.@ And we talked about it and he said, AI want you home for our children.@ And we had talked over the years, and the boys have said we are in a much better position because I was home. Because, AMom, I forgot my paper. I need it in the next five minutes. Can you run it over to school? I need these materials, can you go to the library?@ AMom, I got hit in the face. My wire from my braces is stickin= out of my mouth. Can you take me to the orthodontist *now*?@ If I had been teaching in Farmington living here. . .

TR: You couldn=t have done that.

CR: I=m sorry but you=ll have to wait until I get home from school. And a lot of people had told me, AOh you have an ideal job. Because your hours are the same hours as your kids=.@ But, and you knew this, when we didn=t have kids, some days I came home from school and said, AI=ve got a splitting headache. I gotta be in a quiet room. I=ve had so much noise going on.@ So the last thing I wanted to do that day is deal with my own kids. So that=s what. . . and we gave up, I mean we were living off of one salary, off of yours. I mean, we gave up some extras. But they were not things that really changed our lives in reality. We don=t have as expensive cars, we don=t have as expensive house, but were we happy? Yes, we were very happy. And the other thing that really helped us, though, was the fact that I had worked six years. You had the house. Our financial situation just meshed, because I had money in the bank. And so we were a perfect match as far as that went. So we could do it. Today, it=s getting next to impossible and when we look back I sometimes wonder how we did it. But I clipped coupons, I cut your hair, I cut the kids= hair. And yet, we traveled all over the country with our trailer. But we barbequed and back then you could get a campsite for three bucks a night. So we made that work.

TR: Right. Not that expensive at that time.

DC: So the combination of overtime and coupons and. . .

CR: Everything else.

DC: Paying attention to finances. . .

CR: You packed your, I mean I always packed your lunch. You never bought your lunch.

TR: I never went out for lunch or anything, so that didn=t cost a whole lot of money.

DC: And you didn=t go out to the bar after work.

TR: No, I didn=t do that, either. Which a lot of people did, you know?

DC: Yeah, it=s a huge expense.

TR: Oh yeah, it was. I know people that. . . who it broke, really, because they did go to the bar every night after work and they had no money for anything. And they got in big financial problems. And some realized it in time and some did not. And they got into real big trouble. Both the law and other ways, you know, financial.

CR: I also said, and I don=t know all the ins and outs of it, but I always said as a teacher that I believed in merit pay. Because if you=re a good teacher, maybe in a certain circumstance you won=t be wanted. But if you=re a good teacher, there=s a place for you. Because there are enough people that want good workers. I was the same way in the beginning when they start having profit sharing. To me, if the company makes money, I agree with profit sharing. You oughtta share in the bounty of the company. If the company is having a problem, ok, then maybe you need to make some concessions. In the same way as with merit pay for teachers. The only thing was, the company could make billions of dollars and GM=s workers never saw any of that money. Somehow it all got finagled that there wasn=t. And yet, when the company lost money, they had to in contracts give up stuff. Because the company needed to save.

DC: Well what was it like during those times of concessions? When did that start to affect you?

TR: Well, it started to affect us basically right away because with the concessions and stuff. . . we were, on the hood line, we had one man on the press. Well suddenly they said, AWell gee, we=re losing money here.@ And I still today can=t understand how they made money that way. But, you know, AWell, we gotta take a couple people off this line.@ So, ok, we=ll take these people off the line and we have people taking care of two presses. But instead of saving money, they had us put a broom in our hand and start sweeping around the line. So. . .

DC: They didn=t fire you or lay you off. . .

TR: No, they couldn=t lay anybody off, they couldn=t fire you. So I don=t know what they accomplished, what they thought they accomplished. But only if the big shot came walking by, then they could say, AWell, I guess, yeah; you got one person running two presses now instead of one person running each press.@ So just because you got the guy pushing the broom around the line, I guess it makes no difference.

CR: Plus there were more breakdowns and everything else because they. . .

TR: Well, it really hurt production because now, if two presses stopped at the same time, the guy=s gotta fix one. Then he had to go around to the other one, fix that one. So you=ve lost a lot of time and that happened all the time. You know, that only lasted for awhile. Then they put us back on the job. But it=s just, you know, but for awhile you had to put up with all of these cost-saving measures that they came up with. And some of it was really. . . what kind of people do they have sitting in an office that will allow actually that to happen, you know?

DC: Do you remember when that plan took place, where they made one person run two presses and had the other sweeping? Do you remember when that was?

TR: Well, that was probably in the early >80's when that happened, when they did all of that. They came with some goofy stuff. Then, well later on, they came with better automation and, of course, then they came back with computerized automation. And that really took everybody off. Because now [?] suddenly, you had one person in the front of the line pushing the blanks into the first die, the draw die. And then you had only people on the end of the line take >em off. And the skilled trades person, the one person in the skilled trades, he had to work the whole line.

DC: Ok. Just to keep it operating.

TR: To keep it operating. But now, you have robotic automation in there so they could pick up, in my case, the hood, and they could pick it up and precisely put it right on the die where it=s supposed to be and take it off. And not only could they put it precisely on the die, but they also could put it nice and easy on the die. Because before when we had, when I told you we had a chain pushing it in. Well, that [?], you know, *ka-boom!* and they went on the die. And you got a few dings in there and all of that. You know, not on every one of >em because they couldn=t operate that way, but you had a lot more damage to the hood because of that. But now with the robotics, you suddenly eliminated a lot of that stuff. Only if you got some dirt on the die would you get a little ding in the hood. But they eliminated mostly all the collateral damage, I guess you could call it, from that hood just being thrown into the die. Because now you had the suction cups picked it up and set it nicely in place. The hand goes back and the press goes down all automatically, all by itself now, you know? And the next hand takes it out, picks it up real nice, sets it nice on the next conveyor, and it=s pushed up also all in a nice. . . fast, but in a much easier way. So and then the next one would pick it up and push it in the next press. So they eliminated a lot of jobs once they got the robotics in there.

DC: And when was this?

TR: This was in the late >80's when that came in.

CR: It=s kind of interesting because we=re skipping around, but you keep thinking about things and different experiences. But. . . and I think was in the late >80's when they finally decided. . . I mean, you have these fellas working on the presses. They know how the presses operate. They know what to do if there=s a snag. I mean, they=ve been working on them day after day, month after month, they know. Well, again they have supervisors, general foremen, foremen; I mean, they have so many management to kind of corral these people that are operating these presses. Again, and the idea that you just have robots and if somebody=s not standing over them, they=re not gonna work. Well, this foreman on the next street. . . the idea was they wanted to test what would happen in the plant if they took all the foremen and I think general foremen out of the plant, off site, gave them some

training; they wanted to see what was gonna happen in the plant. So, ok. They ship all these people out one day. Well, he went to work. . .

DC: Did they tell you that they were gonna be out?

TR: Oh yeah. They told us they weren=t gonna be there.

CR: Oh yeah. He went to work. . .

TR: And there were no foremen at all in the plant.

CR: No foremen!

TR: Not one.

CR: Now, the foremen thought the plant was, I don=t know, gonna shut down, it was gonna collapse, it was gonna whatever.

TR: It would stand still! Nothing was gonna happen!

CR: So, he came home and, AWell, how did the day go?@ AWell, like every other day. We did exactly what we do every day.@ And this fella that night, we were sitting out on the porch. . . he came riding by on this [?]. AHi, how was it in the plant?@

TR: AHow was it in the plant?@ AWell, it was just great!@ [laughs]

CR: And as he drove around, I thought, AYou=re losing your job. They=re gonna find out. They don=t need you.@ Because these people, now, are not robots. They know their job. They know what they=re supposed to do. GM, the car companies, don=t need all this management standing over these people. And, you know, he did lose his job then.

TR: Yeah, he lost his job.

CR: Actually he got transferred >cause they said they didn=t need him anymore.

TR: When I first came to Plant 14 they had, you know, because we had an inner hood line, we had an outer hood line, and then we had an assembly part that puts the both together until the hood was completely finished. Well, each of these line had a foreman. So we had three foremen on the line and a general foremen!

CR: And how many people were on each of those lines?

TR: Well each line, you had about six people on the line, six people on the other one, and probably about eight or ten people on the other one.

CR: You had a hundred and twenty in your [?].

TR: So you had three foremen running that, and you had a general foremen who ran over those three lines, and they probably had a couple of little lines, too. Because at the time, we had three general foremen in our department. Because the hoods had a general foreman, the bumpers had a general foreman, and the fenders had a general foreman. So that went all great for all this time. Well now they decided, AYou guys can run all of these lines by itself. I guess we don=t need to have three foremen on this line.@ So they took two foremen off. And they had just one foreman run this and they eliminate the general foreman later on. They only had two general foremen in the plant. Because that=s all they needed. And things were just running just great anyway, you know, because. . . >cause with all this new automation, all this robotic stuff, we had less people anyway. So they eliminated all these foremen, and then they eliminated the general foremen. And so we got one foreman for the whole line. We got a general foreman for half the plant, and another general foreman for the other half of the plant. So everything runs smoothly.

CR: And things ran fine.

TR: Things ran just fine. Everybody knew their jobs; there were no problems.

DC: Did you ever find any time when you wanted to talk to a foreman when you needed some advice or anything? Was there ever a time when you missed the foremen?

TR: Not really. Not really. Because, you know. . .

CR: The foremen really didn=t do anything.

TR: The foremen really basically didn=t do anything. And at that time, I=d been working in Plant 14 since 1972. So I knew every job in the plant by that time. You know, there wasn=t one job they could put on me that I=d say, AOh, I can=t do this. I don=t know how to do this.@ Because that would=ve been a lie because I knew how to do >em.

CR: And if you got a new foreman or whatever, sometimes you had to tell him how to do stuff because they didn=t know.

End of Tape I, Side B

Beginning of Tape II, Side A

DC: . . . I=ll label this Side II. So I=ll write and chat at the same time.

TR: Ok. So we were talking about the foremen. So, you know, at the time [??], we didn=t

need the foremen that well because what did the foremen. . . you know, the foreman, basically he took the production count. And he made sure that the line was running. If something broke down. . .

CR: And that everybody got paid; that their hours were registered right.

TR: Yeah, get you the paycheck. And that is all the foreman was, you know, he got really reduced to just some administrative work. And just make sure that your line was running, and if it wasn=t running you get the proper people to go and fix it so it would run again. And that is basically what he had to do, you know.

CR: The other change that came, and I think was about in the middle of the >80's. I told you earlier how they considered them robots and don=t make any suggestions because you can=t know anything. Somewhere along the line, things changed and the company finally realized that these people running the lines may, in fact, have some good suggestions. And in fact, now the suggestion boxes. . . you put your suggestion in, they were locked. They had to evaluate your suggestion and if it was a good suggestion, then they would carry it out and you would get compensated for it. Well, again, because of his background with what he could do, his electrical background, his ability to figure out how to do things better, you came up with a lot of suggestions. And I was always, ACan=t you think of a way to do things. . .@

TR: Pushing me. ATurn in another suggestion!@

CR: Because even if we only got twenty-five dollars or fifty dollars or whatever, that was extra money. And you had some really good suggestions. Now you think in all the years previous, when those all got discarded. Now the company finally realized: these people are not robots. They do know things. And they=re the ones running them. Maybe we should start listening. Maybe they have some good ideas. And over the time, you never got like a ten thousand dollar award or twenty thousand dollar award, but he would get fifty dollars. He would get two hundred and fifty dollars. A couple of times you got a thousand dollars. A couple of times you got two thousand dollars. Tell him about the time when you made a suggestion and they did it without the engineer=s approval because it was such a good suggestion and [?] all kinds of problems.

TR: I was just thinking that. Because eventually when all this robotic stuff came in, they decided that instead of this hood now, we have the inner hood, the outer hood, and that goes automatically to the assembly. They decided to separate the assembly from the inner and the outer hood. So what we did, we built the outer hood. And I was usually on the outer hood line. And we would put >em in racks right here and they=d build the inner hoods and put >em in racks. Then they=d take >em to an assembly place and assemble >em there. Because this way, you could run each line separately and you really didn=t have to have all these people on the line at the same time. Because if one of >em was broke down, actually you still could run the other ones this way. And so they did that. So we had, on the end of our line when it came off the last press, they had a little deal that put

the hood up on its side; and then would run it forward to where we could put >em in the rack. But they had, the engineers had. . . you know, it was a clever thought, anyway. But they had it pushed so that if the line stopped because of course, people had to put it in and so it would stop on the end. And the one, the other hood would come down and would run forward one space. And then another would come down. So that had to be. . . so where it came down, it had to be two separate conveyors. Well, as that happened, because of the fact that there were two little separate conveyors, they would run a little bit off and would bang up the hood when it stopped. It would actually knock the corner off the hood. Or it would bend it over. And we had to scrap it out because you can=t fix that. And so. . .

CR: That was on the outer hood?

TR: That was on the outer hood.

CR: The outer hood has to be perfect. The inner hood is not, but the outer hood. . .

TR: Because that is what you see. So they had a lot of damage. We probably threw out at least ten a day that we, you know, and you=re running into money when you=re starting to throw out ten hoods a day. So I=d been looking at this all the time. And I thought, AThis is kind of dumb. Because they=re really not saving any hoods by having this little thing and two conveyors. Why don=t they just make the chain one? And they=d be all set.@ So I discussed that with my foreman and he thought it was a good idea because he had to account for all of those scrap hoods every day, you know? So I wrote a suggestion in there and I showed my foreman what I wanted done. And he said, AOk.@ He said, AThat sounds great.@ So he brought the millwright foreman over there and I talked to the millwright foreman, what I want and my suggestion. And he said, AThat=s a great idea. That=s a good idea.@ So the next morning, I came in there and it was done. [laughs]

DC: Wow, I didn=t know it could happen that fast.

TR: No, they normally don=t happen that fast.

CR: And then they had to be reviewed and everything else. But this was such a workable. . .

TR: But when you=re running that kind of scrap, you know, you want things done fast. So my foreman was behind that to get that done as fast as possible, you know? And so in the meantime I had put my suggestion in the box and so that would run its course. But so it was done.

DC: It was probably done before anyone read the official suggestion.

CR: That=s what happened.

TR: Right.

DC: Oh, I=m sorry. I didn=t mean to tell your story.

TR: Actually it was. You know, so it was laying around. We had an engineer working with us because when they change the line like this and, you know, to set up the racks the way so we could load. . . to make it easier for us to work with the whole thing. And he was a friendly guy. He was a nice guy. And he came over to me the next day and he looked at that and he said, AHow did that happen?@ You know, so I told him that that was my suggestion. He said, AYou should=ve heard >em in the engineering room up there. They are mad as hell over there because this is their little baby. This is their pet project.@ That was such an engineering thing that was so nice, you know?

CR: That just got changed.

TR: That just got changed without their knowledge, even.

CR: Their permission or anything.

TR: That was terrible.

CR: I mean, they didn=t go through the proper channels.

TR: They did not go through the proper channels.

DC: How long had the old way been running the old way?

TR: Probably for a couple, probably for about three months, I=d say.

DC: Ok. Alright. So they had just designed it and had set it up.

TR: Yeah, set it up and everything else, you know? And, well, it turned out that we never had another scrap hood on that area. So I got paid out pretty good on that suggestion. It worked!

CR: It=s because it was done so quickly; that was. . .

TR: You know, and later on I told that engineer, I said, AWell that really did work.@ And he said, AWell it was good that you just had it done rather than going through, because it probably never would=ve gotten done otherwise.@

CR: Or it would=ve taken how long.

TR: Because you would have to convince all these engineers that that was the way you wanted to do it, you know, and you couldn=t do that because that was their pet project. So they just did it and it was perfect.

DC: Did the engineers ever explain why the damage was happening to the outer hoods?

TR: Well, we knew why it was happening. Because it was obvious, you could see it. And if we would=ve had them come over there. . . because that thing would just stop at a point. Because you have to. . . the one [?] conveyor coming down and the other going up. And it was just in that little. . . if the line would keep running, that hood would just run through. But if it stopped right there, that hood would just dip right into that dip. And then when the other starts going, *choop*, there it was.

CR: But see, again, in that same situation: the people in the offices, they did not always come to look at how what on paper looked perfect, in reality was not workable. Or there was a glitch in it. That was not of concern. But for people and for foremen that needed production, needed not to scrap stuff, those were important issues. So I don=t think there really was the communication that there might have been in some of those circumstances.

TR: Well, a lot of that is the turf. You know, this is my turf and that is your turf. You just stay off of mine. That=s about what it is. Luckily, because this engineer that worked with us, he was a really nice guy. And he recognized, and he told us so many times, he said, AYou guys work with this every day.@ He said, AI=m asking you how you can improve this.@ He said, AThere=s no need for me to tell you, >Oh, you=re gonna do this and you=re gonna work with this=, and it is terrible. You know, you can=t work with it.@ So he said, AI=d rather have you tell me how you want it done than the other way around.@

DC: But it sounds like that was an uncommon attitude for them.

TR: It was an uncommon attitude, because most of them, you know, AYou don=t step on me@, and that kind of an attitude. But yeah, this was an uncommon attitude. Because most of them want, AYeah, this is my thing. This is my baby, and that=s the way it=s gotta be.@

DC: When was this particular suggestion that you were just talking about?

TR: This was in the late >80's. Yeah, it was the late >80's when this happened, when they pulled the hood line apart like that. And they came out with all of that robotic automation stuff.

CR: It=s interesting, I have to tell you one other quick story that we always kind of laugh about. Again, I was always asking. . . I mean, as long as we had a couple suggestions in the hopper it was ok. But when he either got a rejection or he got paid, you know, AThink of something else, because this is a little extra money for us.@ So, and I don=t remember what the suggestion was, but you turned in a suggestion, and you had a year=s time. If you didn=t resubmit it, it was over with in a year=s time. So you suggested something and you got paid. . .

TR: That was, well that was on the inner hood in the [?]. There was, you know, it was actually a conveyor that would push that inner hood inside the [?]. And because of that, it was. . .

no, it wasn=t the [?], it was the last die. And that=s what it was. And that thing would not locate in the die. Every one of >em would be off a little bit. So finally they, actually the die maker that was workin= on it, he came to me and he said, AI=m gonna have to weld a couple of [?] in the die so that that will straighten out.@ He said, AWhy don=t you go turn in a suggestion for that?@ He said, ABecause I can=t do that. I=m not allowed to do it.@ So he=s like, AYou might as well get paid on that.@ So I said, AOk. If you want me to do that, fine. If I don=t get any money, fine. If I do, that=s fine, too.@ So that=s. . . so they had him weld it in, and it worked.

CR: And it saved the company money.

TR: It saved the company a lot of money because now suddenly all these hoods were locating right in there and the presses go down, so no problem.

CR: And so you got paid on it.

TR: Yeah.

CR: Well, like I said, he had other suggestions in the hopper. And there was something else, and it doesn=t matter, really, what it was for. Was about ready to expire. And he thought they were still gonna do it but they were still discussing it. And you went back to your foreman and said, AI want to resubmit this so I get another year in case they=re gonna do that for this.@ So ok, that=s done. Well, a couple months later he calls me at lunchtime. He says, AYou=ll never believe what happened!@ I said, AWhat happened?@ He said, AYou know that suggestion that I resubmitted?@ He said, AWhen I told my foreman which one to resubmit, he didn=t submit *that* one. He resubmitted *this* one.@ And it was true sometimes, they would pay you out. Well if they decided down the road that they saved even more money, then sometimes you even got more money out of it. Well, instead of resubmitting this other one, they resubmitted the one he already got paid out on. And he said, AMy foreman just told me I=m gonna get more money on that suggestion!@ And I think you only got twenty-five dollars or nothing on that other suggestion.

TR: I did get a little bit on the other suggestion.

CR: You got a little bit, but not much.

TR: Not a whole lot.

CR: So here, if that hadn=t been a mixup, we would never have gotten paid out any more on that! So you talk about administration and that sort of stuff. We were overjoyed on that! So at least the company now recognized, and for me, that these people actually knew and could determine some better ways of doing things. Easier ways. You know, finally the company recognized this. Because they paid out millions of dollars. . .

TR: They paid out a lot of money.

CR: . . . to people with good suggestions.

TR: And they wanted to.

CR: And they saved, you know, even more because it was only a small percentage that they paid out. But I mean, you figure, if you=ve got a part that anybody, no matter who, can figure out that it locates right every time instead of scrappin= out parts or having to stop the line. . .

TR: Scrap was their biggest problem.

CR: I mean, you=re talking about umpteen numbers of dollars. Or that doesn=t dent parts or this sort of thing. Why they weren=t doing it back from day one, I don=t know. But at least they realized that this is an important thing.

TR: Well, from day one they didn=t care because we were making, you know, Plant 14 was making big money for Pontiac Motor at the time. So they have a hundred thousand dollars worth of scrap every day, they didn=t really care because they were making millions.

DC: That was when you started.

TR: Yeah. So you know, that was a drop in the bucket as far as they were concerned. They didn=t care. Well, later on when things started to matter and assembly plants said, AHey, we want better quality. We want everything top notch.@ That=s when it started to matter, all the scrap and the repairs they had. So that=s when they started, AOk, let=s have some suggestions. Let=s see what we can do to eliminate scrap.@ And of course, you can never eliminate it, but at least reduce it to a point where you can say, AOk, well we can live with this.@ And the same with the repairs, you know. And because of that, they were able to reduce it by substantial amounts.

CR: The one other thing, too, that I can think about; as the time went on, of the fact. . . and maybe you remember what year it was or that. All of a sudden he came home one day and said, AThey=re talking about closing the plant. The plant=s maybe gonna be closed.@ And, of course, we had the boys, I was not teaching. And the first time you came home with that, I mean, AWhat are we gonna do?@ We=ve got a house to pay for, we=ve got car payments. If they close the plant, are we gonna move? Are we going to go someplace else? Are you going to go to another plant out of state and rent a room for the week and just come home on weekends? And you and I really got very, very concerned about that. Well, and we had some friends. . .

DC: When was this then?

TR: This was like around 1990.

CR: No, it was earlier than that.

TR: Was it earlier? Ok.

CR: Because we went through several of those. So it was earlier. It was probably in the >80's some time.

TR: [?] the mid-eighties that they decided to. . . you know, because there was a lot of talk about, AThis place is gonna close.@

CR: And we had some friends who told your dad, ATom=s gonna be out of a job.@ He was a little more in management and said, ATom=s gonna be gone.@

TR: Well he was in the union, this guy, but he was in the Fisher Body union, not in ours. And, oh yeah, he told my dad, AOh Tom=s gonna be out of a job pretty soon because the plant is gonna close.@ Well, ok, well that concerned us because he=s the union official. And he might know a little bit more; but the rumors in the plant were also the same, you know, everybody that=s workin= this place is gonna close. And not only the rumors but also every flyer that came out. You know, if we don=t get better production and cleaner panels and everything else. . .

CR: Better ratings.

TR: Better ratings for GM and everything else, this place is gonna be gone. It=s gonna be history. So everybody has to work together and do the right thing.

CR: But as time went on, it didn=t materialize. It never came to be.

TR: It never materialized.

CR: And we went through probably three or four of those periods when the same thing happened. But after the first time, I said to you, ALet=s kind of sort of say if, what might we do. But we don=t need to panic, kind of like we had the first time, because until you come home and tell me, >The plant is closing next week Friday=, why should we kind of get in a tissy about the whole thing? *Even* with all the rumors, *even* with these people saying you=re gonna be out of a job. Because maybe you=re not gonna be.@ And we kind of learned from that to just kinda back off a little and not. . . not worry about it. The one time we really, and I think that was when they moved a bunch of people to Tarrytown. Was it Tarrytown, New York?

TR: Yeah, Tarrytown, New York.

CR: And they moved a bunch of people there. And we talked about. . . by that time the kids were older, we were established here. I said, AIf it needs to be, you=re gonna have to go during the week and rent a room someplace and then come home on weekends.@ But I

said, we had already seen at some other places where people had moved. They=d eliminated their jobs, moved to another town, another city in another state; and then that plant shut down or lost people. And then now they were in a strange place and they didn=t have a job. Plus, those people that got moved, they were looked down upon because lower seniority who lived there got eliminated and, AOh, you=re the ones who took our jobs.@ So, you know, that was a big mess. For what do you do? What do you do as a family? And that=s why we kind of had decided a few of those times, I will stay here with the boys and we=ll just have. . . but again, let=s not, until we know that it=s actually gonna happen, let=s just kind of sort of think about it but not get overly excited about it. Because maybe it=s not gonna happen. And of course, it never did.

TR: To us it didn=t. You know, to some people it did actually happen. Because they did eliminate a lot of jobs at the time. The lower seniority people, they actually did lose their job and they had to go all over the country, really, to find different jobs.

CR: And some of the people got bought out and then they could have gone down to Spring Hill when Saturn opened, but they had already bought out of GM, which was a problem for some people.

DC: Ok, so then they weren=t eligible to. . .

CR: To go back.

TR: To go back in then. So that went on for several years, in fact, that [?] that they were gonna close down. And then they started talking about better quality and contracts that could be coming in. And if they want to spend money in our plants, they were also talkin= about [?] eliminated, >cause at the time they=ve already eliminated the foundry and the engine plant had been eliminated by this time. And so they were gonna just close plant by plant. So they decided, you know, at that point either we get the quality so that GM will actually put money into this thing, because pressed metal is where it was gonna be at. And that=s why they changed it now to the metal [?]. Because that was gonna be our bread and butter totally. So at that point it was gonna be do or die for us to get the right quality coming out of the place with what we had. Because all we had was old presses and old machines and old welders and old everything. And we had a. . .

CR: And yet it was a nice. . . they kept the plant nice.

TR: They kept the plant nice. Well, when we got. . . again, that=s in the late >80's some time, I think, when Zupkus [sp?], Jim Zupkus, he was the plant manager. He came in and he decided to. . . it would probably be the mid-eighties when Jim Zupkus came in. And he said, AThis place has gotta be cleaned up.@ You know, he said, AWe can=t get decent jobs, we cannot get good production in a dirty plant with junk all over the place. The dirty dies, you know, dies sitting outside rusting and everything else.@ So he said, AWe=re gonna make this place a place where you wanna work, where you wanna be. We=re gonna make the entrance look like a park when you come in. We=re gonna make this, you know,

this whole place is gonna turn out.@

CR: And he was the plant manager?

TR: He was the plant manager.

CR: No one else had ever said any of this except this fella.

DC: What happened to all these plants, yeah.

TR: Right. And so he. . .

CR: He did that. AWhat do you need?@ He asked them, AWhat do you need?@

TR: He worked on it. They cleaned out, you know, they came to us on the line. AWhat do you need to make your place better, safer, cleaner?@ [?] Jim Zupkus, he=d jump right up on your platform where you were working and said, AI=m the plant manager, I=m Jim Zupkus. How can I make your job better?@ I mean, we never had any. . . you know, the big boss from the whole place comin= up to you. . .

CR: And talkin= to you.

TR: Even talk to you, for that matter.

DC: How did you feel about that when he did it?

TR: I felt good.

CR: I even felt good about it!

TR: I felt really good that this man actually took the time to come out there and. . .

CR: And he actually did it.

TR: And he did it. AI wanna make this place a better place for you to work.@ And he did. They fixed up the outside, they. . .

CR: Put picnic tables up, trees.

TR: Yeah, put [?] in, put bushes in. You know, they made like a garden area out there.

CR: For your lunch hour.

TR: Even painted the blacktop green where you walked in. And they cleaned, you know, he cleaned up all the dies that were sitting outside the plant. You know, even today you can

look outside the plant: it=s nice! There=s nothin= out, there=s no junk out there. Well before, you had rusting dies from the 1950's still sitting out there, you know?

CR: I always said: Where did this guy get the money to do that? If that money was allocated there, what did the plant manager before, before, before and after, and after, and after do with that money? Because obviously he had the money to do all these things. I mean, I was like, wow, when I saw what he had done outside and in the plant. And sorry to say, though, they moved that plant manager. He went to Texas. He went to Arlington.

TR: He went to Arlington, Texas, and in fact that is when they started up, also in the late >80's, they started up the team concept. You know, this was started by the Japanese and they decided, well we=re gonna have just in time delivery and we=re gonna start the team concept. Now they hadn=t started this in our plant, but in Arlington, Texas they started that. And, in fact, they sent people from our plant over to Arlington to see how that was working. And, in fact, I got to go myself. I spent three days over in Arlington at the Arlington assembly plant.

DC: What did you think about it?

TR: Well, I had mixed feelings about it. I mean, this is something that was very new to us.

CR: It was sort of replacing the foremen.

TR: It was basically replacing the foremen, but also with team concept you gotta rotate jobs, you gotta. . . it=s good, yet it=s not good. Because in the earlier days when you got established seniority, you could get a better job. Well now suddenly you get team concept; everybody=s gotta rotate jobs. So you=re gonna wind up with the lousy jobs as well as the better jobs.

CR: And the older people are gonna have to move the heavy parts and all of that.

TR: Right. It=s not the young people anymore that are coming in and they can take care of the little heavier parts and the older people can take the little lighter jobs, you know. So I. . . and plus, of course that was a different kind of plant. You know, this was an assembly plant where we went in. So it was a little bit different in what we saw. And, of course, I spent three days in the plant but you know, yeah, everybody=s just still working like they=ve always been working. So it=s. . . you can=t see too much by just watching.

CR: >Cause it wasn=t really the operation of the plant, it was how the hierarchy of the management operation was going.

TR: Right. That=s basically really what it was. And I did to talk to Jim Zupkus also while I was there because he was the plant manager. We made it a point to go see him. So he asked about how things were going in our plant. Well, not quite as good as they used to be.

CR: You=re gone.

TR: You=re gone and things are again, they=re in the state of are you gonna get jobs or are you not gonna get jobs, you know? They went back down. So and I said, AWell, the next thing is they=re gonna be pushin= team concept in our plant and I guess that is going to determine whether we=re gonna stay open or not.@ Which they did.

CR: And you became a team leader.

TR: I became a, you know. . . they brought team concept in certain areas of the plant, and Plant 14 was one of the later ones, really, to get team concept brought in. So when they finally did, I signed up to be a team leader and I got the job. We had. . .

CR: You were there for a year or two.

TR: Yeah, we had about five or. . . it was six team leaders, I think, in the plant. And so we totally replaced foremen. I mean, they had to have foremen because as a team leader you couldn=t discipline an employee who was doing bad because we were still hourly employees and we were still union employees. So but basically we were running the lines and we were taking care of production and if the line broke down we had to call the maintenance people to come fix it.

CR: And sometimes you had to work on the. . . if they needed somebody, it didn=t matter if you were a team leader, you had your responsibility. You still had to work on the line, too.

TR: Somebody didn=t show up, well you had to jump on the job and that was about it, you know? So you=re basically a utility man and foreman and everything all together.

CR: But now you=re talking that you=re getting close to your thirty years. And at that point, we were. . . before, probably six months to a year before you had your thirty years in, we were getting concerned. We still had two kids in high school, we were looking at college costs.

TR: This was about >91, >92 was when this happened.

CR: We were also looking at the contract. Because once you turned and had thirty years, if you died in the plant, your wife had six months of health care and that was it. And we came close to as soon as he had his thirty years in (not that you were sickly or anything else), but of retiring as soon as you hit your thirty years because of that six month. And we knew some people that, you know, had a problem with that. Well then, in the next contract they changed that; that if your, if you have thirty years in or more in the plant and you die in the plant, they automatically retire you and then your wife automatically has health care coverage. But it was not in there right before he turned his thirty years. And that was a major sticking point: what do we do? He really needed to stay in the plant, but. . . and of course, it was when you were a team leader, too, they start cutting back on that. And then the next thing he=s going on afternoon shift.

TR: Yeah, they were gonna cut back team leaders. Well I was the lowest seniority as a team leader on day shift.

CR: With thirty years in, or twenty-nine or whatever.

TR: Which I knew, but I. . . I had about twenty-nine years in, I think. You know, they said, AWell, you=ll have to go on afternoons.@ I said, ANo, I don=t.@ I said, AYou can have my team leader job and I=ll just go back on being just a team member.@ And I said, ABecause I=m staying on days.@ So that=s what I did. Well, they kept me on for a few more weeks because they really didn=t want to get rid of me. Because when they first did that, they thought there was another team leader who wasn=t doing quite the job that he should=ve. They thought they were gonna eliminate him. Well, he had more seniority that I did, so he stayed and I was out.

CR: But at this particular time, the fella next door we had seen so many people from, like, a few years, that were a few years younger when you started; and by the time you get twenty-five, twenty-eight, thirty years, I mean they have nice jobs. They had good jobs, nice jobs. And our goal was for him to stay working until the boys were out of college. That was a kind of given for. But now this was not working that way. You=re going on afternoons when you got thirty years in?! What do you mean?!

TR: Yeah, I said forget that, you know, I gave up skilled trade for [?]. So I said I=m not staying on the team leader for, you know, for the fifty cents an hour. I mean, forget it, you know? So I said forget it. So they put me back on the line then, or off loading hoods. And I got basically a pretty lousy job doing that. In fact, I had a. . .

CR: He wasn=t twenty-five.

TR: Right. And I was unloading hoods and it was a big problem because they had a truck driver who was not too young himself and I don=t know how well he could see, but every time that he was putting the forks in the rack that I was loading hoods on, he was pushing that rack forward. Well, he was handling those inner hoods with the. . . sharp on all sides. And suddenly you=re inside carrying that hood and suddenly, *bang*, as you=re being moved five feet. Whoa, you know. And that happened so many times it actually put me in the hospital. Not because I got cut or anything else but because of the stress.

CR: The stress. His blood pressure went up.

TR: So I decided that had to be the end of it.

CR: He had to get out of it.

TR: Because I complained to the management, I complained to the union and said, AThis guy, he shouldn=t be on a truck. You know, he=s hitting me every time.@

CR: Nobody really cared.

TR: They talked to him but it never stopped. So finally, so they started up a new team concept area in Plant 25, which actually was Plant 51 and 55 and they renamed it Plant 25. They got the engines out of there. And it was going to be sequencing for the [?] plant, sequencing [?], which are the bumpers, bumper covers. So a friend of mine, he was the leader coordinator over there. And I said, AWell, how=s the job over there?@ He said, AWell, we=d love to have you over here.@ So I went to our plant clerk and I said, AI wanna go to Plant 25.@ I said, AI can=t stand it here any longer.@ You know, because this guy=s gonna kill me here.

CR: For my safety.

TR: And so he said ok. So the following Monday I moved, which was just after Easter. Now that was 1994. So I started there and the whole place was in chaos because they had just brought everybody and they just set it all up. And it came from, you know, from an outside company, actually, that couldn=t really do the job. And so they said, AHey, you know, we gotta bring this in to Pontiac Motors@ also, because we had so many people on layoff. You know, the union said, AYou gotta bring some of these jobs back in here and let our people do it. Why pay all these people to be laid off and then you got an outside company doing all the jobs for you?@ You know, that makes no sense. So they said, AOk, we will try it.@ So they brought it in and, of course, we had to keep up production with Orion; sixty-six an hour they were building, cars on the line. But this was all new to us and here you got, we had I think five car lines and, of course, they=re all these different colors [?] and they had to be put in racks. Or actually those were in. . . each rack had six bags in it and you had to throw the [?] in the back and the fronts and the rears in different racks. Well it had to be the right color for the right sequence with the right time and everything. So that was pretty tough to set that up right away.

CR: And of course Orion needed the parts just in time because you=ve gotta ship [?].

TR: I mean this was just in time to [?].

DC: [can=t hear]

TR: Right. So of course, we were working practically twenty-four hours a day when we first started. We had two shifts of twelve hours, in fact. Even though Orion wasn=t working that much. Well, they were working nine hours a day on each shift. But we had to work around the clock to get the production for them. In fact, we had Orion people out there trying to help the situation. We had the plant manager of our plant even helping out because sometimes we needed it. Because at the time we had to put [?] strips on there, little chrome [?] that are on there. We had to put some lights in it and all of that stuff. We had to assemble some of these bumpers, too.

CR: And then they got to Orion and then there were some that were damaged, so then they called >em back and said, AYou know you shipped us damaged parts.@

TR: Right, you had damaged parts. You need to ship another one and so you had to ship other parts besides the production parts. So it was a huge mess. But I worked in that for a few months. They had, also, they had trained the team leaders to do all of this. And well, the team leader on this [?] area, he didn=t like what he saw. And he had time in, and so he said, AI=m retiring@ one day. They weren=t too happy, but he got out so they got another guy who was. . . and they said, AOk, you=re the team leader now.@ So, ok. So I came in, so when I came in there I learned the jobs as all team concepts. So every day you were learning a different job, you know, we were doing different things. And at that time you stayed, well we stayed on the job for a whole day and the next day you do a different job. So we had to learn all of that and, you know, you got all these different bumpers or they had different [?], different lights, different all kinds of stuff to put on.

CR: But you were the team leader in charge of that.

TR: I wasn=t a team leader at the time. I was, you know, I just came in. So, well then later on they decided they were gonna have somebody help the team leader out if he wasn=t busy or so. I said, AI would be glad to become the assistant team leader.@ >Cause I told our leader coordinator that is what I want. I said, AI want to be the team leader in here.@ And he said, AOk. Well, when the time comes.@ You know, he said, AFine.@ So, you know, we had. . . as good as things were in both Plant 5 and Plant 14, things were chaos and even the people were. . .

CR: Were different.

TR: . . . bad. Were different in that plant.

DC: How were they different?

TR: How? I guess. . .

CR: They=d come from a lot of different plants.

TR: Because these were all lower seniority people. Because I came in one of the highest seniorities. There were people who had been laid off, who had been shipped to other plants in other states in other areas in the state. Similarly, they were all hired back in here. So they had gone through some not so nice experiences within GM. So, you know. . .

CR: They didn=t have the loyalty, they didn=t have the. . .

TR: There was no loyalty.

CR: They didn=t really care.

TR: They didn=t really care. They were just put in this place and they really didn=t want to be there. And so we had a really hard time. The nice atmosphere that I had in Plant 14, especially, all those years that I was there (and that was ten years, twenty years that I was in Plant 14). And they. . . that was such a different atmosphere, such a. . . I mean, when you feel [?], you suddenly just felt like the walls are caving in on you. And the attitudes were so bad on these people. But we got the thing off the ground. We got to where we, they could reduce the overtime on us. We eventually got to the point where we could work the same hours as Orion did and we got all the parts out on time. In fact, even to the point where we got some free time, too.

CR: Got a little ahead.

TR: We got even ahead of time. We were, a lot of times we had to wait for the racks to come back. In fact, they did make some improvements. We first had some racks with only six bags in there; well then they stack >em two high and they go in the truck. Well later on, then they came out with racks that you put fifteen parts in there and then it would go out. So that made it a lot easier and you didn=t have to stack >em up. >Cause the truck driver was pretty busy, too. And I did that, too. I did every job in there. And I got my license. But then the guy who was our team leader, he became sick. And in fact, in December. . . no, November I think this was, he died. So at that point I told, I said to the leader coordinator, I said, AAm I gonna get the job?@ AWell,@ he said, AOk. We=ll talk to the union rep about it.@ At that time it didn=t go by seniority anymore. You just. . . if they felt you=re qualified for it. So they said, AOk. The job is yours.@ So I became a team leader at that place, then, until I retired, in fact.

CR: But that=s where you had Lydia and all of that problem.

TR: But then I had, right. . .

CR: It was very, very stressful because he had, he kept records of everything and he was very organized. When anything happened, the big boss called the secretary and they called him and, AIt=s your fault.@ Well, he=d get his little records out and say it wasn=t.

TR: As a team leader, of course every day I had to count parts because parts were so critical and, of course, they were brought in a whole full rack with fifteen parts and that would be all the same parts, of course. And the same bumpers, the same color, the same car line and all of that. So we had to take all of these on a long line and we had a [?] machine in there that somebody had to run and get all of these parts in the right sequence; all the different models.

CR: And then pack >em get >em ready to ship.

TR: Pack >em and put >em on the line and the people on the line would take care of it, and then it goes in the rack and the right way and that goes to Orion. Well, sometimes we would run

out of parts because either they forgot to order enough parts or the manufacturer didn=t get the parts ready because of some glitch in their system. You know, that happens. So every morning I had to count one-third of the front bumpers and then the next one-third of the rear bumpers so that everything would be counted in time so we know what production is. And every once in awhile we had to do big inventory to count everything at once. So, but here I counted my production and, you know, I counted what was in stock. And I gave it to the secretary there and she didn=t do anything with it.

CR: If she just set it aside or whatever.

TR: I had already learned that I have to protect myself in that job as I never had to do anywhere else.

CR: He was like the foreman then.

TR: Because, again, now I was the foreman who had to run the line. And I knew, see, that the superintendent liked her. I don=t know what relationship they had, but it was all of that and she could no do wrong. And so I knew I had to protect myself no matter what I did. Whatever I turned in I made copies first and then I turned it in. And so that count, because the count was usually. . . you count everything, well there=s a discrepancy for certain areas. So we had to go recount >em and then sometimes I would find there was discrepancy and sometimes I was right and that=s all the parts we had. Sorry, but your records are wrong, you know. Well, so I turned this in to her and I kept my copy. Well, a week later we came and we=d run out of parts.

CR: So of course somebody=s gotta be blamed for that.

TR: So I got called in the office and, you know, AYou were supposed to count these parts last week.@ And they went through her records, of course, already. AYou were supposed to count these parts last week. You never counted those parts and so now we=re short. It is your fault.@ I said, AReally?@ I said, AOk. I=ll find out what happened.@ So I went to my records and I said. . .

End of Tape II, Side A

Beginning of Tape II, Side B

TR: . . . so, and this went on with all the different things. We had run-ins with her all the time. So finally, you know, we did have actually a foreman there who was over the whole plant. But he was there in case discipline was necessary and stuff like this. And so he knew that I kept records of everything. So whenever something was wrong, of course, they told him and he had to come to me. So usually he asked first. He said, ATom, I know you keep

good records.@ He said, AThis is what they told me. Do you have an answer on this?@ Usually I did. And usually I could say, AYeah. I=ll tell you what happened. This is such and such and such, and this is what. . .@, you know. Because usually I could put it right back to her. Because that=s where the problem was, you know.

CR: It wasn=t with him, it was with her.

TR: The problem usually wasn=t with me, and my boss knew already right away: don=t come yellin= at me because usually I kept things pretty straight. And all he had to do. . . in fact, if he needed something, even to protect himself, he could come to me and say, AHey, can I have a copy of such and such because this is what happened.@ You know, because they were hollerin= at him, too. And I said, AOk, here it is. We=ll make a copy of this and you can protect yourself with the same thing.@

CR: We worked through this now, you know his health was a little bit in jeopardy in Plant 14. Now we move to 25 where the stress level is high, the work and the people involved; it=s not a. . . the pleasant atmosphere is not there. Our kids are, you know, the one is graduating from high school, going on to college. You know, he=s got his thirty-two years in. The health is being affected. What do we do? Our plans were: you were gonna have a nice job, you had the time in, you have a nice job, you work until the boys are out of school. He=s got one more year, so we=re talking 2003. This is 1995, >96. You got thirty-two years in. There was talk that his operation was going to be out-sourced soon. I said to him, AI would rather have a healthier husband and a poor husband than a richer husband and either a sick or a dead husband.@ I said. . . and it really helped when our older son finally made the decision that it was gonna be Michigan State. We had purchased MET contracts for both the boys. And so we knew if they decided to go to a state school, their tuition, at least, would be covered. He applied to several out of state schools. So when he made the decision that it was gonna be Michigan State, I said to him, AYou=ve gotta get out of there. You=ve got your time in there. It wasn=t what we planned to do. I mean, you asked me years ago about would I care if we were on strike, we didn=t get any money. You know, the boys. . . at least we know their tuition is gonna be paid. You gotta get out of there. You just, you can=t stay there.@ Well then he came home and said, AWell, they *are* going to out-source this operation. In fact, I think if I retire in the summer, they are gonna out-source this. And if they do, guess where they=re gonna put me: on the frame line. Moving heavy steel.@ Now we=re talkin= you were fifty-one. I said, AYou=re not moving steel. You=re not moving, you know, fifty pounds of steel all day long for eight hours at fifty-one years old. You got your time in. You=re gonna have to retire.@

TR: Need to get out.

CR: You need to get out. And so the day he retired, they moved that whole sequencing out to a private concern to save money because they=re paying those people, you know, nothing in relationship to what they were paying there. He never had to go on the frame line and he=s been retired since.

DC: It=s like running out of a burning building here or something.

TR: Yeah, really. But of course, all the time that I was a team leader it was basically Orion that was paying the bills for what we were doing. Because we were working, really, for the Orion plant. And every time that they [?], AOh, we gotta save money. We gotta have less people doing all of these jobs. You gotta work less overtime, you gotta work this and that. . .@

CR: But you still had to do the job.

TR: AWe still want everything done, of course, but so now we gotta eliminate people here.@ They=re looking at the jobs, AYeah, we gotta eliminate people there.@ So now, as a team leader, they eliminated the person who I had, or who had to fill out the sheets that had to go on every rack. Now I had to do it, as a team leader, besides what else I had. Then I=d get a call from this secretary lady, AOh, I need to count so many parts.@ Well, in the meantime I was doing the paperwork there, then a guy got sick or whatever, he had to go so I had to work on the line. Sometimes I worked the whole day on the line doing everything else at the same. . . while everybody had a little break, I had to go fill out the sheets. And that went on there for awhile like this. Sometimes I just called the foreman and said, AI need you on the line right here.@ And sometimes he would actually work on the line, or I=d have to fill out my paperwork. Because I said, AI can=t do it all. You know, you gotta help me.@ Or send him to count. Well, later on he didn=t want to deal with this lady in the office. So he said, AI=ll work on the line and you count the parts.@ [laughs] I said, AThat=s no problem, whatever.@ So we had to do that. But then they came by [?] and said, AOh, we=re gonna eliminate a couple more people@, because you know, they would put other jobs. . . you know, a person would be doing certain job. AWell, you can do that and you can do the other, too.@ And so they just started eliminating, start fooling around with the people who were already unhappy. I had a couple of drunks on the line, too. They went out at lunchtime and they drank until they were silly and they came back, obviously drunk on the line every day. And so I had to deal with those. And then I had to deal with management, who were trying to eliminate jobs and put more on certain people. And I had some really good guys, too. Some really nice guys who were [?].

CR: And you had some nice women, too.

TR: Some nice women working for. . . but then I had to go to these. . .

CR: And there was a nice. . . he had nice black people, too. Some of the others that were causing the problems, not them.

TR: Right. No. But then I had to go to these people and said, AWell, sorry but last week I told you that this is all you had to do. Now they come tell me that you gotta do this and you gotta do that, too.@

CR: So that made him look real good.

TR: That made me look like an idiot, you know. That=s what they would do all the time. You know, that superintendent, he was crazy, too. But I=m sure he had his orders from his bosses, his superiors and stuff. But still, he couldn=t see the fact that I was doing a tremendous job; I was getting all the parts out real good. In fact, one time we were. . . well, we were sending those racks to Orion all the time. And, you know, Orion liked to play games, too. And that was. . . and so they=d come on there and this one time they came over. We sent them a rack that had. . . >cause there were fifteen parts in the rack, fifteen bumpers. And this had, there was one that had ten bumpers on the top. . . or there were seven on the top, there were three in the middle, and there were five in the bottom part. I said, AHow can you send >em over like that?@ I said, AI know we did not send >em that way.@ I said, AI know the people racking these bumpers@, and I knew who it was because in my records I made up sheets, and I know the people rotated every day. But I wrote down exactly who was on what job every day of the time that I worked there that I was a leader. So I knew exactly; they came back ten days later and said, AYou did this@, or whoever. Or they wanted to know who was on that job. I could go to my papers; that=s the person who was on the job. And so the superintendent came down to me and he said, AYou sent this rack and it=s all messed up and Orion is mad. They want some action. They want somebody disciplined.@ You know? I said, AOk, well who are you gonna discipline?@ I said, AI know we sent these parts out right.@ He said to me, AWell,@ he said, AI want you to go to Orion.@ He said, AI=ll pay you overtime.@ >Cause this was almost the time to quit my job. He said, AI will pay you overtime,@ but he said, AI want you to go to Orion and I want you to find out what happened.@ I said, AOk.@ I went to Orion and I was there five minutes and I knew what happened. So I came back and he said, you know, and he was still there. And I said, AOk, I=ll tell you what happened.@ I said, AWhen those racks come in at Orion, the first thing the truck driver does, he takes the poles out on the end of the racks that holds the parts in. What happened then, what I surmise happened (because I can=t tell you that for sure, but I know what happened because I=ve seen it happen). The truck driver picks up the rack and he makes a stop. Guess what happens? Why are these poles in there? They=re to keep the parts in there. Now these poles are out. So he stops, *boom*! There goes the top layer, or [?] when all the parts are in the middle in this case.@ I said, AThe truck driver came around, he picked >em all up. He didn=t care what [?], he just shoved >em on the top rack. Then he put >em on the line.@ I said, AThat=s exactly what happened.@ Ok. That=s the last I heard about it. [laughs]

CR: But I mean, the stress level for all of this when he=s got his time in; and that=s why I said, AYou=ve got to leave. You=ve *got* to get out. We have another son who knows where he=s gonna go to school. But you=ve gotta get out.@ And that=s why we made the decision and it was before a contract. People said, AOh, stay for a contract.@ I said, AWe=ve never taken a really nice vacation with the boys where we really. . . you know, it was always with the trailer, it was always we did our own cooking, we always did all this.@

I said, AYou know, the time is coming when they=re going to be eventually gone.@ I said, ALet=s go to Walt Disney World. Let=s stay on the property. We don=t have to stay in the most expensive hotel, but we=re gonna pick a nice one and let=s go and let=s not worry about things.@ And I said. . . the one thing that I was real happy; that next contract, they got coupons for ten thousand dollars off of a car. We lost that coupon. Now there was a lot of rigamarony >cause you had to buy the car in five days or a lot of stipulations with that. The one thing that I was very glad and that the union did that would=ve made me feel bad if we hadn=t been eligible for it. . . and you know, you have this with your kids with your programs. Do you save for college, do you spend your money. If you save your money then they say, AOh, you=ve got enough money.@ If you use it for other things, AOk, you qualify.@ That whole game. But when the union fought for the college scholarships for active kids, for retirees= kids, for even deceased people=s direct descendants, not grandkids or this, but if they=re dependent. And so when they got in, that our boys qualified for those scholarships; and I was really happy that it even included retirees. Not too many retirees have dependents. But of course, you retired when you were fifty-nine. . .

TR: Fifty-one.

CR: Or fifty-one. That was not the plan. But under the circumstances I really felt he couldn=t stay. He couldn=t stay. For all of those reasons. And I said. . . ten years before we looked at our neighbor and other people, you know, they got enough time in. They got nice jobs. I=m sure for your job, you know, when you start off you start on the bottom. And as you work your way up, not that you don=t work hard or do this, but you find your niche where you=re most comfortable in, and that=s where you hope you are. Not at the very end; then they start changing all the rules. So I said, AYou know, your health is important.@ And that=s why we made the decision. And it=s been a good decision. We=ve had less money, but I said. . . back in the early days when they fought for thirty and out, then they fought for thirty and out at any age. A lot of people were, ANo, just give us a salary. Just give it to us in our wages. Don=t worry about retirement. Don=t worry about health care. Don=t worry about dental. Don=t worry about vision. Don=t worry about anything.@ And I don=t think some of the other unions were quite as adamant, but the UAW said, AYes, we will work for wages. But we=re gonna work for pensions. We=re gonna work for eye care. Because some day you=re gonna need that.@ Well now, in the last ten years, the fact that, you know. . . and under the circumstances because you couldn=t really stay there, you had that option. And it was the union that fought for those. And I really do believe, and I think in a way the auto industry and the UAW sort of set the pace over the years for MEA, for a lot of other unions, because they were fighting for these other benefits that a lot of people, AI don=t need vision care. My sight is fine. I don=t need dental care, my teeth are fine.@ But eventually you need all those benefits. And the UAW actually brought everybody=s standard of living up. Because when they got it, then other unions said, AGee, that=s a nice benefit. It=s a good thing. We oughtta have that.@ And it was that collective. . . and the sad part of, I think, the work situation: in order to cut costs, and I mean, I=m sure it happens in the teaching profession as well. Let=s out-source. Let=s

bring in these less expensive people here to do the same work because now we don=t have to pay >em as much. We don=t have to pay >em benefits. We don=t have to provide all of this stuff. And it=s not that the membership of the union has gone down, but the jobs have gone. And what do you do getting out of school? Our older son now got a good job. I=m not so sure it=s gonna be available for our younger son. Even after four years of college, even after good grades and stuff. Because they=ve eliminated and said, AOk, well we=ll ship this out.@ And your sequencing got shipped out to a small company where, you know, they work for nothing and the benefits are nothing.

DC: Where was this small company?

TR: It=s Mackey [sp?].

DC: Oh, it=s around here?

TR: Yeah, it=s in. . . it=s in Oxford.

CR: But that=s what they=re doing for all of these. And eventually, the companies wanna only have assembly plants. We have a friend that works at Orion. He said (and I forget what they call it), they=re building, like, components in these small appliance. So that when it comes into the UAW plant, all they=ll have to do is put the front end on and the back end on and the top and the bottom, and ok then it drives off the line. But all the people that actually did all the work, which used to be done in the auto plants at good wages, good benefits, are now going to all these small plants.

TR: It=s all preassembled now.

CR: It=s all preassembled. And if you don=t, if you can=t produce the parts, you don=t have the workers, then we=ll just pick it up and move someplace else.

TR: And that=s the problem with a place like Mackey because it is a UAW shop, but yet the wages are not like the auto companies.

CR: You don=t have the strength of the auto company.

TR: Yeah, you don=t have the strength because of the fact that GM has only limited operations in there, and if they don=t like what you do they=d pull it out because they own everything.

CR: And they own the stuff. They own the machinery. They own, you know, they=re only like renting or using it. So it=s gone. So, you know, for all of these people; what are they going to do? Because all those good jobs are gone.

TR: They can=t even go on strike because if they go on strike GM will just pull their stuff out of there and move it somewhere else.

CR: They just hire [?] and move it someplace else. So take it or leave it. We=re gonna pay you eight bucks an hour. If you want the job, fine. If you don=t. . .

TR: That=s why you=re only working for eight dollars an hour in a plant like this, you know?

CR: With almost no benefits.

TR: Right. They don=t have the strength, even the UAW is not as strong in a place like that. You know.

CR: So the union has really provided, really, I believe, with the standard of living; have raised it up. But not just in wages, in all the other benefits. You know, without that, what do you have? I had a hospital bill last January. It was an emergency. They came back and said, ASorry, we didn=t consider that an emergency. You have to pay.@ Well, we took it to the union, they filed a whatever investigation. Well, they reconsidered it. . .

TR: And they paid it.

CR: And they paid it. But they only paid almost half the bill. But if I=d had to pay, I would=ve had to pay the whole bill. If we didn=t have the union, sorry.

DC: It=s even helping you now.

TR: Yeah.

CR: So they=re there to help people. And, you know, that=s what the union does for people. You read about, and I don=t know about OU, about graduate assistants, professors, whatever, having the same kinds of problems. And if you don=t have a group of people that are willing to say, AHey, wait a minute.@ I mean, you had to be reasonable. There=s no question about it.

TR: Yeah.

CR: But without, if you were an individual; well, too bad. We=ll hire somebody else. And what do you do? I mean, you got a family, you got kids. What do you do?

DC: About forty percent of the hours being taught at Oakland are being taught by these part timers with no. . .

CR: No benefits.

TR: Nothing, yeah.

DC: With no loyalty from the institution to them. There=s no section, they=re gone.

TR: That=s true, yeah.

CR: And is the quality. . . I mean, I look the same as in the teaching profession, too, they wanna hire people right out of school because they have no experience, they have no advanced degrees. They can pay >em the minimum amount. If they have a choice, ok, they=ll look for somebody maybe who=s good. But if they have somebody who=s got a lot of experience who really is good, they won=t hire >em because. . .

DC: Too high up the pay scale.

CR: It cost too much money to hire >em. So where is that; are you really looking for the best people or are you looking for the cheapest labor?

TR: And I do feel with the UAW, they=ve always been reasonable, what they asked for. They, you know, these people have always looked at, I guess at the books or at least at what=s supposed to be in the books. You know, they never ask for things that GM, Ford, or Chrysler for that matter really couldn=t afford. You know, they=ve always been reasonable with them and said, AYou made this kind of profits. You can share that with the workers. You can raise [?] by three percent or whatever.@ They never asked for the world or things so elaborate that there=s no way that they could do it. So I think they have been reasonable. More so than some other unions who [?] by six percent or even more.

CR: I often think about (and this is a little off the subject), but Iacocca with the bailout of Chrysler and what happened with that. And the fact that they brought that company back and even paid off the debt sooner. And the one time, they made so much money that Iacocca. . . was not contract, was not anything, said, AOk, we made this money. I think the workers oughtta share. We=re gonna give everybody five hundred dollars.@ When he didn=t have to do that. How many companies will say? Ok, GM makes five billion dollars and you get three McDonald=s coupons.

TR: [laughs] That=s about it.

CR: But, the thing I said, they said, AOk, if the money is not made in North America, we=re not gonna share with the North American workers.@ Well, if the money is made in Mexico and you turn around and you give those Mexican workers that share, ok. But you didn=t give it to the Mexican workers. You say the North American workers can=t have it. Where does that money go? And that I don=t think is. . . I mean, give it to them if you made the money there. But they don=t do that, either.

DC: There=s one question that I have that=s going back quite a ways here, but I just noticed it on my list here and we started talking about your move to Plant 25. There was one thing I wanted a little clarification on. You mentioned that there were a lot more robotics coming in and the presses were being more automated.

CR: That was in 14.

TR: That was in 14.

DC: Plant 14. On the other hand, I know at one point you were saying that there was a lot of old, perhaps even outdated equipment in that plant. I was kind of wondering, you know. . .

TR: Actually there was. . .

CR: In 25?

TR: No, we=re still talking about 14. Yeah, of course most of that is gone now because since I left, they had brought in transfer presses. They got three of them in there now. And, you know, where us you had a press and then the conveyor, the press, the conveyor. And so now it=s all actually one press.

CR: If you ever get to see that. . .

TR: If you ever get to see it. . .

CR: It=s mesmerizing.

TR: I mean, that press is practically from here to the next house over there. That=s how long it is. And, you know, it=s just actually one press. It makes one [?]. But you got all the dies in there, you got about six or seven dies in the one press that can, you know, that presses everything at the same time. They have a little transfer robot in between each die that transfers, you know, that puts the part there, that take the part to the next one. And the press never stops. It just keeps going up and down.

CR: Because when it goes down, it stamps all these different things. When it goes up, they=re transferred over so when it goes down again. . .

TR: By the time it goes down, it=s already in place. And it goes down and it=s just a beautiful sight to see.

CR: The first time I saw that. . . I mean, the tour was kind of moving along and I just, I was staring. When I was young, one of the things my parents did was take us through factories. >Cause you could go through on factory tours, you know, it was an inexpensive thing to do on vacations. And I loved seeing how chocolate was made in Hershey, various plants. So to see that transfer press like that. No human. . . I mean, it was all encased. There were no human. . . and the other thing that=s really amazing about it: when they change dies on lines, I mean the line had to stop, they had to pull the die, they had to get the other die, put it in. That could take two or three days to change a die.

TR: Oh, it did. They had to unbolt it and everything else. And then they had, you know, of course they had to pull all the automation out from between the presses and everything before they could pull the dies. So then they had to put it all back in there. . .

CR: And then put all the automation back.

TR: And get it all lined up again and everything. Of course, you=re putting a different part in there then, so it=s all different. You had to change it. And so then, you know, when they changed it to another part, another die in there for another part, pull all the automation and stick that in, it would take another three days. So, you know, you had so much down time. Now with these transfer presses, they could leave all the automation practically in place.

CR: And they have a tract.

TR: They do have a little. . . they have a tract, the dies come out. And also the dies are not bolted in anymore. They=re clamped in. It=s automatically clamped. And they have two die beds now. And so they put the next die already all in place, the whole thing. So when it=s time to say, AOk, this is the end of production. We=re gonna change the dies.@ They just push a button, the doors go up. They have like garage doors at the side of the press. The doors go up, the one die bed goes out of the die, the other goes in. . .

CR: The doors go back down.

TR: The doors go back in, the top comes down that clamps the top part of the die on there, and they=re ready to go. And all they have to do is change a few of the arms on the automation in between. You know, that doesn=t take long. And within an hour they=re ready to go. This took days before.

DC: How do you, in your mind, how do you reconcile the technological beauty of that with all the jobs that are lost as well? Is it an improvement or is it. . .

TR: Well, you know, that=s a good question you=re asking. Because technologically, it=s an improvement and, of course, quality is better. Because you don=t have handling. You know, any time you handle anything, you=re gonna get dings, you=re gonna get scratches, you=re gonna get all kinds of stuff. So this way, you know, you don=t have it. In fact, even the guy, with the old stuff, even the guy on the draw die, he still had to throw the blanks in the die. Now you don=t have that, either, >cause they got a robot taking care of that. So, in fact, they have. . . all the blanking of the number one service parts, like all the other parts, are done outside the plant now. Then they get >em all wrapped and everything. And so they just put >em up there and it=s a robot that puts >em all nicely, again, with suction cup picks it up and puts it in the die real nicely rather than scratching it all up as it goes in.

CR: But when you ask what do you think about that because all the jobs that are lost; to me, use that technology, you have to have people designing that kind of operation, you have to have

the maintenance of that operation. When you get that done, then look at what else you can design. What better ways of even improving on that? So it=s not you=re eliminating jobs, you=re eliminating those kinds of jobs. What you used to do in the plant is kind of eliminated, but there are new jobs for those, new tech. . . I mean, you have to be trained in that, but there are jobs that we need to fill for newer other kinds of things. Now you=re freeing up this workforce of this manual labor to create a new workforce for new jobs, new technology. Whether they=re represented by the UAW or whatever, I mean we have a lot more things that we could put people to work to do.

TR: And they have modulized all the stuff now, you know, all the equipment. But the problem is, and that takes people to do that; the sequencing, the modules they put together, and the pre-assembly of items all has to be done. But a lot of this is done now outside GM actually. And either overseas or across the border, or in small shops right here in Michigan, too. Like Mackey=s and all of that, you know, they put dashboards together and that=s all being done there. At the assembly plant they just take the whole thing, pluck it all in, and it=s done. You know, GM could be doing all of that stuff and pay the wages that they are, you know, and save on all the shipping costs. Because that costs money too, all these trucks going back and forth with all those modules. And the sequencing parts and everything else. It could all be done in house, and to me, probably just as efficient as what they=re doing outside, because by the time you eliminate all these trucks going back and forth on I-75 and everything. But, you know, they are saving on labor cost, there=s no doubt when they=re working for only half the money at these plants as what they are here; and that is what, of course, GM wants to do. But basically they would not have to sacrifice all the General Motors jobs. That=s what they=re doing.

CR: And, you know, we need to use the technology to go forward in other fields. An example, and we talked about this, I had an old chest freezer of his parents. It was huge. We=ve had it in our house probably twenty-five plus years. It is probably thirty-five years old. It froze to zero, never had a problem with anything. It finally gave out after all those years. So, we go to the store, we=re gonna buy a new freezer. I said I want a frost-free, I want an upright, I don=t have to have as big a freezer. I tell the fella, the salesman, I said, A My old freezer lasted thirty-some years. And so I want a freezer to last at least thirty years with the new technology, I oughtta be able to buy a better freezer than the freezer I have. And it=s wonderful because I never had to worry about the freezer.@ The fella laughs. And I sort of said, AWhat are you laughing about?@ He said, AWell,@ he said, AI hate to tell you this, ma=am, but the freezers they=re building now will only last eight to ten years.@ I said, AEight to ten years?! My old freezer lasted thirty-five years!@ He said, AMa=am, if they built them that well, you wouldn=t have to buy a new freezer. So they don=t build things like that anymore.@ And we were talking to an engineer and we were telling him this story, and he said, AYou know what that=s called? Value engineer.@

TR: Value engineer is what they call it. [laughs]

DC: Yeah, there=s George Orwell coming back.

CR: Now, our technology. . . are we supposed to go back to, you know, the days of arranging the parts in the machinery; is that what we wanna do and throw out the technology and advances? We have to train people for different kinds of jobs. And when you look at those presses, I would love to see the company that builds that. Because that press cost millions of dollars. It has to be built precision wise. There=s a lot of jobs involved in that.

TR: But I guess I could add to your question, because since we were actually slated to close it was either a matter of you bring in the transfer presses or we=re gonna shut you down. And your quality has to be up to snuff to bring in the transfer presses. So we got the quality up and we got the transfer presses. They built three so far and I think they=re gonna be building more. So, I guess when you look at it that way, at least we kept the jobs; because we did get the quality up to GM standards, to where they were happy with it. And, you know, they brought in the jobs. So at least what you actually have in there is because of the quality, because everybody worked together and said, AOk, we=ll do the best we can.@ And GM said, AOk, I like what you=re doing. So we=re gonna give you the contract for these presses.@

CR: But on the same respect, when they were building the Fiero, they had top quality. They had top workers. They told them, AYou=ve got to have that top notch.@ So they did. And what did they do? They scrapped >em. Now it was political, it was a lot of other things that played.

TR: That was politics.

CR: But they told the workers there. So the workers said, AOk, we=re gonna do that.@ And they did it. And it didn=t matter.

TR: They built those from >74- >79 and, you know, it kept us busy because we built every [?] for the Fiero in our plant. So that was nice for us. And you know, most of those were not automated, so most of these were all by hand; put >em in the press, put >em in the welders and all of that stuff. But at least that gave us plenty of jobs for those years that they built >em. And that hurt us very much when they scrapped the Fiero because it took a lot of jobs out of our plant.

CR: And it was a good selling car. A lot of people bought those.

TR: It was a nice car. Yeah.

CR: Any other questions? I think we=ve told you our life story.

DC: Wow. Well I=m gonna have to hit the road pretty soon. I have to get back for my younger son=s baseball practice. But I really appreciated this. It=s been amazing, again, to talk.

TR: We=re happy to do it.

CR: And if you=d get us the tapes. . .