Steve Strzelecki Interview
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Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
Transcribed by Daniel Clark

DC: . . . oops, someone's coming in. [short break] We're rolling now. We're rolling now, and it's working. So, we'll hope for the best. Um, you asked about the format, and the way I start is with really basic questions about you growing up and all. I like to learn a lot about where people grew up and what it was like before they ever got involved in the auto industry, yeah.

SS: [hard to decipher]

DC: So one of the easiest questions is, where were you born?

SS: Oh, I'd say, OK, I was born in Detroit, Michigan.

DC: In Detroit, OK.

SS: Yeah, Detroit.

DC: And if you don't mind me asking, when was that?

SS: May 27, 1931.

DC: 1931, OK. Um, were your parents from Detroit?

SS: Well, my, uh, my Dad, OK—they immigrated—my mother immigrated from Poland.

DC: OK.

SS: OK, and they moved to—what do they call it?—to Pennsylvania. And then from Pennsylvania, Detroit. And my Dad—my Dad—my Dad was born in Pennsylvania. My mother was born in Poland. It was a couple of years before she got here. Then my Dad and his family, they homesteaded up in, just north of Standish [village in northern Michigan]. They homesteaded a hundred and eighty acres. That's my grandfather.

DC: That's, what, up in the thumb somewhere? [referring to Michigan geography, as the state is shaped like a mitten] Up around . . .

SS: Up, on—north of Bay City. North of Bay City.

DC: Yeah, right. So let's see, there's a lot of information right there. When did your mother come over from Poland?

SS: Let's see. She must have came over right about 1921 or so—she was about eight years old, something like that.

DC: OK, and then, you say your father was born in Pennsylvania.

SS: Pennsylvania. He had just—they had just immigrated—my grandfather had immigrated, and my Dad was born in Pol—I mean in Pennsylvania! OK.

DC: And when was that?

SS: 1905.

DC: 1905, OK. And where in Pennsylvania?

SS: Homestead.

DC: In Homestead? OK, did they work in the steel mills?

SS: Well, OK, probably not my grandfather—probably then, he probably didn't—wasn't a steel mill—probably more a farmer.

DC: OK.

SS: OK? He might have worked in the coal mines a little bit, or something like this, you know, with everybody—he was probably more of a farmer, OK? I mean . . .

DC: And then they moved to Standish?

SS: No, they probably—well they came into probably Detroit. From Detroit they got that homestead property up there, in Timbuktu!

DC: OK.

SS: On the north side of—about ten miles north of Standish.

DC: Now was that your father's family?

SS: Yeah, that's my grandfather on my Dad's side, yeah.

DC: Dad's side. OK. All right. And were both your mother and your father in Homestead?

SS: No no no no. That was—they didn't even . . .

DC: They never crossed paths . . .

SS: They crossed paths probably in Detroit.

DC: Oh, OK.

SS: OK, because they—they probably grew up in what they call Hamtramck, where a lot of the Polish people and people from that part of the world settled, you know what I mean?

DC: Sure, oh yeah. I was just trying to keep things straight. But it sounds like your father—your father was born in Homestead, then went to Detroit, then went up to Standish. And where was your mother's family? They were in Pennsylvania as well, you said.

SS: They, they, they—but not in the same area probably, not there at all.

DC: Where in Pennsylvania were they?

SS: I really—I never got any definite [?] on my mother's bit in Pennsylvania, you know where they stayed. I know that my grandfather came over first, before the First World War started. And left my mother and her two brothers—my mother never even seen her Dad. She was born after he took for America. And it took—it took eight years before—that he got them back—he got them in America. He was staying at some relatives that he knew—some cousins or something like that in Pennsylvania—exact, oh, I never did know, really—my mother never said too much of that, even though she wrote out a lot of things about her parents' background in Poland, you know. She wrote a certain thing out a couple years before she died, she—about her background there. But it's never been that, you know, detailed, you know.

DC: Sure. Do you know where your parents met?

SS: They met in Detroit.

DC: Detroit, OK.

SS: In—what do you call it? My Dad was hanging around with her brother. And they used to go to, what do you call them, the dance halls and that, whatever. Then he met my mother [chuckles].

DC: Sure, yeah, yeah. Let's see, at that point, do you know why your Dad—let me stop for a second. Did your Dad come alone from Standish down to Detroit?

SS: No, probably, he had a sister that lived in, in Hamtramck or Detroit, OK? [slight interruption—much better sound quality] . . . when my Dad and mother got married, they lived with my—that was the Depression time, OK? You know, after the '29—you know, the '29 break and that. And I was born at my aunt's home, you know, a midwife type of thing, you know, what they did back then, you know.

DC: Right, right.

SS: They didn't—you were born at home! [chuckles]

DC: What was your Dad doing in Detroit?

SS: Well he had worked—OK, he had been working at different shops throughout, you know, not General Motors, but you know, Ford, Bud [?] Wheel, Chrysler shops, and oh, you know, just whatever. It was always the type of thing that he'd work for so long [snap of

the fingers] laid off. He didn't even get—OK, only needed to get it when things was really going.

DC: OK, so he had a lot of jobs . . .

SS: At that particular time in his life he had—he did various jobs in, in Detroit, you know.

DC: Do you know what kind of jobs?

SS: Oh—well he, he was a metal finisher and whatever, you know—you know, just plain assembly line worker, you know. He did several different jobs like that, and you know, whatever—whatever they needed . . .

DC: [finishes the sentence] He did.

SS: He did. OK?

DC: Yeah.

SS: To have a job, you know.

DC: That's good. So where were you living when you were born?

SS: In Detroit. Probably, OK, until I was probably about a year and a half old or so, then they—my Dad—you know, work was slack in Detroit. Everything. So one day he heard through the grapevine they was hiring at Fisher Body in Pontiac. And my Dad said, "Well I'll give it a try." Everybody says, "Pontiac? Where's Pontiac? That's way out in the sticks up there, north," you know. "That's up north!" So my Dad says, "Well, I'll give it a try, and I'll get on the"—he said he had a quarter or something—you could ride the interurban at the time—because he got on and whatever, and rode all the way into Pontiac as far as he could go, found out where Fisher Body was. From there he had to walk down Baldwin [chuckles], go to the—where Fisher Body was at that time. You know, I mean, it was—uh, Pontiac was, was booming, like, in a sense. So he went there, and, he hired in.

DC: He hired in. OK.

SS: Hired in. OK.

DC: Yeah.

SS: And, and, again he though, maybe this would only be a temporary job, you know, OK. Say, you know, work for a certain while, then they laid him off, then he got called back up. "Well son of a gun, this is unreal." So that's when he—at that time he made a move—he met while he was working on the line there, he met a Italian fellow, that he worked side by side, or across the line like this. And you know, they talked, you know, about where you're living. And my Dad—you know, he said, "Hey, I got a place I

could—I know a place out here, oh, Timbuktu, Waterford, you know, that you can rent. You could live here," you know.

DC: Yeah.

SS: Oh, OK. So, the next thing you know my Dad moved me and my Mom out in the sticks out there. And literally, my mother thought—I mean at that time it was crude, OK.

DC: How old were you at that time?

SS: I was probably—I was probably not over two years old, I probably was, OK. Yeah, I was probably two years old at that particular time.

DC: So that's when you moved on out. Now when you say you were in Detroit, were you in Detroit or Hamtramck, or where exactly?

SS: Probably, I'd say, but it was probably Hamtramck, OK. You know, it was the border, I would say more or less it was Hamtramck. You know, as I knew where the family was living there, you know, my mother's—I mean my Dad's sister, back within the area there.

DC: Did any of the—did any of the people from Hamtramck or Detroit move on up to Pontiac at the same time?

SS: Well no, no [stuttering a bit] my Dad was the adventurer, to go. Everybody else took to Detroit, you know, the Hamtramck area, like that. All my mother's brothers and whatever, and of course then my mother's Dad and grandmother, OK—grandfather and grandmother—then they moved up to Standish.

DC: OK, you still had the property up there?

SS: Yeah, they bought some—you know, got some property, a little bit of property up there, and they moved, moved up there.

DC: So did you grow up in Waterford then?

SS: Well, [some stuttering] the rest of my life was in Waterford.

DC: OK.

SS: That's where I went to, you know . . .

DC: What do you remember about growing up in Waterford?

SS: Well, it—growing up there, of course, it was out in the country. You know, it wasn't—you know, we didn't, we didn't have what they called running water or nothing, or—until 1941 when my Dad put, put—other than the outside latrine—I mean outside toilet, you know—and inside water until 1941.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: Well that—so that's how it was at the time, you know, primitive, still country.

DC: Did your Dad continue to work at Pontiac Motor.

SS: Oh, at Fisher Body . . .

DC: Fisher Body, I mean.

SS: . . . yeah, yeah. Oh definitely. I mean he, he stayed right with Fisher Body, because they called him, you know—he says—my Dad was about as loyal to—as you can't believe it. [laughs] Said, "This is the first time, of every place I worked for, that I got a steady job." They're calling me back, you know.

DC: So even if he was laid off, they always called him back.

SS: Yeah, he always got called back, see, so he was very grateful, and very dedicated.

DC: Do you remember what his job was?

SS: Well, he, well he started out, of course, with the—he worked on metal finishing, to trim and final. He was good at upholstery, you know. Every time there was a job available for—that paid a nickel an hour more, he took it. He tried it out. I can remember as a kid, he used to, when he was trying out for, uh, upholstery work, you know—they used to go ahead and use tacks to tack everything in, you know—and he, to practice at home, I used to go ahead and take these tacks, and have a magnetic hammer, you know, and he'd just hold them in his mouth, and then practice. He'd have to do them [pounding sounds] pretty good, you know, and when there are cars on the line, whatever they're doing, OK. So I can remember him practicing.

DC: Wow. So it helped him.

SS: Just to get that nickel an hour more. And then the war came along. You know, Second World War, and then he, uh, he got into the—well they laid off for a period of time for the changeover from autowork, and to do some guns and stuff like this, you know. So for that interim period, he worked as a mechanic for the Army.

DC: Oh, OK.

SS: They were hiring people one day, you know—my Dad always worked on cars, OK. Always kept cars running. However it was, he kept cars running. And so they were—they were supposed to be hiring for mechanics at GM Truck and Bus, where they were doing trucks, you know, Army trucks. And they would always, you know, they would always [?] them, you know. And he'd go ahead and, "I'm going to take a chance." Went there, son of a gun. They hired him.

DC: Is that right.

SS: So he had an interim period of maybe, uh, oh less than a year maybe, or something, to work for the Army, and then they—he had to always go to Fort Wayne in Detroit to—it was a fort there where the government, or the Army, had them go over there. So that's where a lot of the work was being done. And they had to go on convoys with trucks that they had—some that was being shipped out there—work on some at GM Truck and Bus, you know. Oh, he loved that job. Yeah, in fact he was offered to go to England at that time.

DC: As a mechanic?

SS: As a mechanic, with the Army Ordnance—he was working—he was Army Ordnance. He was Army, government . . .

DC: OK, was he officially in the Army, or just . . .

SS: No, no, no, no. He was working as a civilian employee for the Army, OK?

DC: Right, right. Yeah.

SS: And, oh, he wanted to go in the worst way, but my mother was pregnant with my youngest brother. No way. No way. Already—four kids, well, you don't go ahead and leave [chuckles] so that kind of put—but then he got called back, or put back, when the gun job got going at Fisher's, then he went back to Fisher's, and he got into the—as a tool grinder. Drills and all this type of—you know, you know, sharpening drill bits. He got into what they called semi-skilled, or something. So he got in that at that time, and then, then things changed again when they changed back to civilian work, get back to whatever, and [?] working on the line, you know.

DC: Yeah.

SS: And then—they had an offer to, uh, to get into a tool room, working on jigs and fixtures and all that. Of course working on the line, he knew all that, OK? I mean, he knew the basics, and so he took and got a chance, made an application—he got into, you know, into the tool room, so to speak.

DC: OK, yeah. So that was after the war.

SS: After the war, yeah, after the war, the Second World War. So from that point, he, he would, you know, go through the training program for working in that area, and then, even though—let me see. He didn't have [mumbles] that much formal education, OK, you know what I mean? He had background in math, a lot of these different things—I mean, you know when you—probably didn't have, probably, sixth grade education, you know, from his younger years like that, you know. And he was having a little difficult time getting, getting, near the point of getting his journeyman's card. Well at that time, I came into the picture, somehow, and I—reason I was in school, and I knew how to read blueprints, I knew how to [mumbles], and I started tutoring him.

DC: Oh, OK. Uh huh.

SS: You know, so at that time, it was, you know, I was—I was into Pontiac Motor at that time in my life. I had—I went in the service, and got out . . .

DC: We'll have to sneak up on some of that. You just covered a lot of ground.

SS: Yeah, right. A lot of ground there. A lot of ground covered from the war to when I, you know, as I went through high school and all that business.

DC: Well let's start—let's go back and talk a bit more about those things. But first of all, you mentioned that you had some siblings. How many brothers and sisters did you have.

SS: Just two brothers and three sisters.

DC: Two brothers and three sisters.

SS: Six of us.

DC: OK, six of you. All right. And were you—where were you . . .

SS: I was the oldest.

DC: You were the oldest, OK.

SS: I was the oldest, yeah.

DC: Um, OK, so it sounds like you had a pretty full household in the 1930s.

SS: Oh yes, yes. OK, well, it was over a period of—my—like I say, my youngest brother was born in '41, and my youngest sister wasn't born until '45.

DC: OK, all right.

SS: But it was a split from '36 to'41, and then, you see, '41 to '45. So it was like, hmm, separate little families there from our original four, OK?

DC: Right. You would have been considerably older than your youngest . . .

SS: OK, so there was, you know, I was born in '31, I had a brother born in '33, and a sister born in '34, and a sister born in '36. Then from '36 to '41, you know, five-year gap.

DC: Then a brother, then a sister.

SS: Then four years later, a sister.

DC: Yeah, yeah, right. Wow. What was your Mom doing during those years?

SS: She was a Mom! [chuckling] She took care of her kids.

DC: That's a lot to take care of.

SS: Huh?

DC: That's a lot to take care of.

SS: Right, it was.

DC: Yeah. Um, do you have any recollections—you would have been very young—but how did your family get by in those years?

SS: Well, it was—we used to put in a big garden. There was—there was no lawn. There was nothing. My Dad used to spade it by hand, you know, the whole part of the property that he had, you know—and then he bought his property, that place that he rented at one time, ended up buying it, you know. And [pause] usually the summer was pretty good at that time for autoworkers, because they'd lay off the summer, but work like heck—sort of—when September or fall came, they'd work like a son of a gun. It was a certain layoff time, you know, the changeover. So my Dad put up a garden, and then of course everything we—you canned stuff.

DC: Did your Mom do most of that?

SS: Oh, we was all involved!

DC: Oh, you were all involved, OK? How old were you when you first started helping in the garden?

SS: Oh, all right, you're a kid, six, seven years, whatever, you started—you *weed*! They'd teach you how to weed. Oh yes.

DC: So you were involved pretty early on.

SS: Oh, that's the way it was. If we got—if we went up north to our grandfolks, you know, for, you know—not an actual vacation, but just go up there—my Dad used to help grandfather do some haying and whatever. It was the same thing there. Kids—you went ahead and did the weeding [laughs].

DC: OK, so you're an expert weeder!

SS: Well, oh, that time, oh, any kid—Grandma kept those kids busy, you know.

DC: Right.

SS: That was quite a—that's how you went through the times when there wasn't—what do you call it? That extra stuff coming in, you know, SUB pay, unemployment, whatever—you, you had to make do pretty—sustain yourself by knowing how to put in a good garden and canning stuff.

DC: It sounds like you grew a lot of your own food then.

SS: Oh, a lot of stuff we used to can. Oh, you know—yes!

DC: [laughs] Amazing. Yeah. How about school? What school did you go to?

SS: Well, OK, I went to the Waterford schools at the time, for, for eight years, OK. Nine years, OK. I went to [Hudson, or Knudsen-Culvert?] school.

DC: How far away was that?

SS: It was, oh, less than a half a mile. You walked to school. No buses, and whatever—you didn't have a lunch program. You went ahead and either came home for lunch, or took your lunch. It was, it was, you know—they didn't have no snow days or nothing like that. If the snow was this deep, you just [laughs] took off to school.

DC: Right.

SS: Nowadays, you know, the kids—everybody's on buses now, so it's different.

DC: Where were the other kids from? You know, do you remember at all, like when you were going through elementary school? Your family was pretty Polish, it sounds like, you know. Were there people from other countries, other nationalities around there too?

SS: Where we lived?

DC: Yeah.

SS: No.

DC: No. OK, there weren't.

SS: No, no. It was quite a diverse neighborhood, OK, I mean. But it was not—I will say—I was, I would probably say, the only one with a Polish name.

DC: OK. But you say it *was* a diverse neighborhood?

SS: Uh, yes.

DC: In what ways was it diverse?

SS: Well, it was—oh [mumbles] it wasn't a lot of—what can I say—if I can remember—[pause]—I can't go ahead and describe it. Diverse, to me, in that sense—there was a lot of people from the South, OK.

DC: OK.

SS: OK? There was a lot of south, southern people at the time. And being a very, a neighborhood of, of usually factory workers. OK, a lot of them worked in the factory, worked at, oh, different—like GM Truck and Bus, and Baldwin Rubber, and some of the smaller plants all throughout Pontiac. Uh, but I can't say whether it was diverse in ethnics, or stuff like that.

DC: Sure, OK.

SS: OK, you know.

DC: It just seems that your, your family moved away from, you know, a Polish enclave there in Hamtramck . . .

SS: Yeah, well, yeah, my Dad and Mother moved there. The only one of our friends that my Dad made—it was—he was Italian, and he built a grocery store about a block away from my Mother and Dad. He's the one that got my Dad—my Dad used to work with him until he finally quit. He had his own [?] to own a grocery store.

DC: Oh, so the guy who worked in the plant . . .

SS: He's the one that helped my Dad find a place to work. So he had property there, and he just go ahead and—you know, good friends. So for a number of years, my Dad and my Mother was good friends with the Anthonys, at the time, you know. And it—used to go back and forth, and whatever they—so they would be quite a–he was—this guy was quite a worker too. He used to always tell my Dad about, "You gotta—what you gotta do is, you gotta save some money every week and do it for yourself." Do something—like, he would do, he'd go ahead and make his own box, you know, into a form like that. And he built a store. And he built a house. And then—he had a little help, maybe, from his wife's relatives—a little bit of financial, for starting the store. And they had what they called a neighborhood store for, oh, a number of years. And built the original store, built upstairs, they lived upstairs, built another house, and then, then he, then he built— added on to that store, made it the new store, and sold this store that he had right next door to [?], and sold is as a—it was a restaurant and bar. So they were good business people.

DC: Yeah, I guess so. He expanded quite a bit. Yeah.

SS: They're business people.

DC: Did you ever venture back down to Hamtramck?

SS: No, I—we used to go that ways to go and visit there all the time.

DC: OK. OK.

SS: Oh, because my mother had aunts and cousins there, you know, see. And two brothers. Uh, so, going back there and visiting was, you know, quite often.

DC: Did they ever move out—did any of them ever move out to Pontiac?

SS: Uh, no, no. They all kind of stick around in Hamtramck, or they moved out maybe to Detroit, you know [mumbles]. They stuck around. You know, they always talked, you know, about my mother Mary, you know—Mary's out there way up in Pontiac, you know, with all the kids. With all the kids. [laughs]

DC: Was the church a big part of your life growing up?

SS: Well, yes, my Dad—OK, when they had, when they had, oh, what is that? I can't tell you. It was probably, oh, '36—at one time my Dad went ahead and was approached by a priest, a Polish priest—they were starting a Polish church in Pontiac. And my Dad kind of got, uh, what do you call, associated with that, but we—it was over a couple of years, it was quite an association. My Dad was on the committee, and doing all the things. Of course that's where I went to church there. You know, the whole family went there for a lot of years.

DC: Yeah, yeah. So anyways, let's see, you already mentioned briefly that in high school you had already learned how to do some blueprints, read blueprints . . .

SS: Oh yeah, I went ahead and, you know, I got out of—Waterford didn't have a high school or anything. It stopped at grade school level, because they [?], so we went to—we had a choice to go into Pontiac schools or—we started in what they call junior high school—or, let's see, if you lived in one area you could go to, of Waterford, you went to Pontiac. If you lived in another one, you went to Clarkston, or something. You know, Waterford's a big area.

DC: Right.

SS: And mine was close to Pontiac schools, so I went to Washington Junior High, and from Washington Junior High to Pontiac High.

DC: OK, yeah. So you went on to Pontiac High then?

SS: So I graduated from Pontiac High.

DC: You would have started there right around the end of the war I guess, right.

SS: No, forty, what was it, '45, in that area right there.

DC: So what do you remember about high school?

SS: Well, I thought it was, real good. Pontiac High was a real good high school. I got to go—I got to go ahead and put that on a list that it was a very good high school. It ended up, I took an industrial course, industrial—what they called industrial arts then. You go to college, general, or industrial arts. And they had a very excellent industrial arts curriculum. You could take auto shop, machine shop, welding, electrical, printing. They had a very good, very, very excellent curriculum in that area of—because it was—they—during the war they used to go ahead, and was given money by the government to teach people—they needed to upgrade the skills in the industry, you know. So they had a real good—and of course, I benefited from it. I took the industrial, industrial course, and it was quite nice.

DC: Yeah, so it sounds like high school worked out pretty well. Did—what was it like going into Pontiac to high school? You had been out in Waterford for a long time.

SS: Well, OK, we were on the edge like that, so what it ended up—oh, you had to take a bus [mumbles]. But it just happened to be, I had been working in the grocery store, the neighborhood grocery store, and when I was fourteen, I got my own car.

DC: Oh really. OK.

SS: [laughs] So it ended up that I—I drove to school [laughs].

DC: You drove to school. OK.

SS: [?] if I was working on the car, you know, going up and down. I used to walk. Jog over there. Go down Pontiac, go through the State Hospital, and maybe less than, less than two miles.

DC: Not that far then.

SS: Nah, not for a young guy, you know.

DC: Sure, not at all. Was working in that corner store your first job? Or what other jobs did you have?

SS: Yeah, right. Well, when the people that owned the store sold it to another party—and then he bought another one, way out, OK—and he—I don't know if my mother told me—the neighborhood store is right across the street, like, almost, and so the owner, the new owner says, "You know, I'm looking for somebody as a stock boy or something. Do you know anybody?" "Oh, I got a son that's, you know, twelve" or thirteen—I was at the time. Going on thirteen, you know. "Do you think he'd?" you know. "Oh, I think so." So, "Let me see him," you know. So I went to him. "Oh, OK." So I started working for him.

DC: Yeah. How did you like that?

SS: Well, it was—to me [mumbles] after school, you know, work for two hours. At that time, taking care of the bottles, putting them in cases, you know, and all the empties. Stocking, whatever. And then when he sold it, another owner was in there, and he took me on. I kept working there, and the next thing you know I was sixteen years old—I was running the store really, in the summer. The boss kind of—whenever he just—left it in my hands—and I was going to be a store person all my life!

DC: So that's what you had in mind at that point, yeah.

SS: At that point, because I learned how to—he taught me how to butcher and, you know, whatever, and everything.

DC: OK.

SS: So I—you know, small neighborhood store like that.

DC: So you did everything from butchering the meat to stocking the shelves and everything.

SS: Went to the markets and bought things—his mother bought the store and the, and the restaurant and bar—all the same owner. And I said, "I'll work there."

DC: Where did you go to the market to buy all the stuff?

SS: Oh, we used to go to the, the terminal down in Detroit, where everybody else bought their stuff. And in summer, when the Eastern Market was selling stuff, go to the Eastern Market, when that was there.

DC: And so did you drive a truck down there?

SS: Yeah, right. We had a pickup truck with a little thing on it, and used to do that.

DC: Did you get your first car with the money you made at the grocery store?

SS: Oh yes, yes.

DC: All right.

SS: Yeah, right. Well, a little bit—OK, I worked at the grocery, but I also did previous—we used to go ahead—the farmers used to go ahead and hire us kids to pick potatoes. Well at that time, if you was a good worker, and a farmer—you'd get out of school for a couple weeks.

DC: Oh, OK.

SS: You had to, you had to be pretty—for that to be all right, whatever. And you'd go ahead and you'd pick potatoes. You'd get seven cents a bushel, and, you know, work all day [laughs]. At that time—at that time it was good pay. They'd make—pick forty-five bushels, fifty, that's three, three, three bucks. Three-something anyway. That was good money.

DC: How many years did you do that?

SS: Oh, I think a couple years, you know. I did that a couple years there.

DC: Yeah.

SS: You know, in the fall, like that, was potato season. And worked in the store.

DC: Yeah.

SS: And that was—always, you had a few, during the war like that, you had some war widows, so to speak. I mean, that their husbands was, you know, in the war, in the service, and do some chores for them—mow their grass, do certain little things, the pieces that needed to be done that they couldn't do, you know. A quarter here, and fifty cents . . .

DC: It sounds like that part ran in the family.

SS: Well, if you—you know, you did it. I don't know.

DC: Yeah, yeah. That's good. There were, there were definitely opportunities for you.

SS: That's right.

DC: Um, so, let's see—I take it then you graduated from the industrial arts program?

SS: Yeah, right. Yep.

DC: And what did you do after that?

SS: Well OK. OK. Got out of high school in 1949, like that, OK. And I was still—you know, I'm working at the store full-time, you know.

DC: OK.

SS: And I had a interview at the time to go to trade school. And then, what it was is that, the Korean War, you know, the draft—I had to register for the draft at the time when I was eighteen, you know. And the superintendent of the trade school, and he interviewed here, and they seen my, my school record was, you know, favorable, OK. Even though in the last semester, instead of, probably—[short pause] I had a choice of majoring in machine shop or auto shop. It was only last semester I took auto shop, because I got my own car, you know. That's the easy bit for me. So I took—went ahead and I went to interview and he says, "Well, are you—have you enlisted in the Reserves?" "No, I [haven't] enlisted in the reserves." Well see, a lot of young guys that were getting out of school at the time, they were getting into the Navy Reserves, Army Reserves unit—because supposedly now, you get in the Reserves and your exempt from getting in the draft.

DC: Right, right, right.

SS: Well that was the theory. Well it ended up that that theory didn't work, because a lot of the guys that went ahead and got drafted—he said to me, "Well Steve, if you can get in Reserves, or you can get married and have a couple kids," real quick or something, he said, "then I'll hire you in the trade school. Then you can stay in."

DC: But he didn't want to hire you if he thought you were going to be drafted.

SS: Yeah, right. OK, they didn't want that. But then it ended up—I don't know how many of these guys that were—took the Reserves, that all of a sudden, when the government said we need extra people, they took the whole Reserves *unit*! So, so anyhow, the superintendent basically got—whatever. So I—it ended up that I—OK—I didn't pick the trade school, and then I worked—I was working in the summer, and then I—"Jesus, I'm putting in long hours in the store," and I'm out of—you know, and I'm still going to school, and I asked the boss for a raise. Well, it ended up that—the guy was going to

give me a raise, OK, but his mother still dealt, did, whatever, you know. She dealt with the store and her restaurant. She was the, the . . .

DC: In charge?

SS: Yeah, sort of in charge. So it ended up, she did give me a raise, but she said, "Well now, now we're going to have to go ahead and take out more income tax out, and whatever. It ended up that when they got the raise, ended up I got six dollars a week less than what I was making *before*.

DC: So had they not been deducting those things from your check?

SS: Huh?

DC: Were they not deducting those things from your pay before?

SS: No.

DC: OK. All right.

SS: I says to myself, "So wait a minute!" I mean, you know—I was very, very upset, over it. I went home this one Saturday night, and my mother says, "Well did you get the raise?" "Oh," I said, "I got a raise all right. Oh yeah." "What's the matter? What happened? What happened?" At first I was quite discouraged, because I thought I'd been working for them real good for about, you know, five years already or better. Well, my Dad said something, he said, "You know they're hiring at Fisher Body." Said, "I've seen—I've heard that they're hiring people there." Well I—"Oh, I don't know if I want to"—I was just in that mood, you know, and said, well, I didn't want to go into a plant—I mean this wasn't something that I was going to do. I was going to be a professional grocer or butcher or something [laughs].

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: Well, I went ahead and I took off early that—on a Monday morning. I was supposed to open the store about 9:00 or so, but I took off, you know—so I sent to Fisher Body and all, and there's a lineup, you know, people—employment office. And you know, "I'm not standing in line here." But then I took off to GM Truck and Bus. Same thing there. They were hiring, but there was a lineup. Well my feelings at that point—I said, "Aw, I've never had any good"—what do you call them, things, or heard about Pontiac Motor, because if you worked at Pontiac Motor, it was the foundry, or heat treat, or some bad, some bad jobs. I'd heard already from people that worked—came in the store about, you know, you get in at Pontiac Motor, and they stick you in the foundry or—real bad jobs there.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: Well I just—heck, I'm coming back and I said, "Well, I'll just drive by and see what Pontiac Motor is doing." I drove by, drove past a line, quite long—I was already parked,

by the hiring department. Might as well walk by here, and oh my goodness. "Oh, I don't know." It's—I said everybody's [?]—as I'm walking in front of the employment office, this one, watchman, you know, was at the door, you know, directing people. And, "Hey Steve!" "What?" The guy that was a neighbor, lived about a block away, and he'd come into the store—I used to see him all the time. "What are you *doing* here?" Said, "Oh, I don't know. Just . . . " "Are you interested in getting a job here," he says, you know, "I know the hours you put in at the store and all that. Are you interested?" "I don't know," I said. "Come on with me." And he took me to the head of the line, inside the employment office, went up to the employment interviewer, says, "I'll vouch for this young fellow here," he says, "hire him."

DC: Wow. Wow!

SS: Right there. Right away.

DC: How long was that line? How many people were . . .

SS: Oh [laughs] a half a block long! I mean, the line went back, I mean. And so, they called me up and he said, "Well, you can have an interview and your physical this afternoon." I said, "Oh, wait a minute. I gotta . . . " "Oh," he says, "when can you do it?" "Maybe tomorrow." I was thinking about opening up the store! I mean, you know, take care of that duty there, you know. So, he says, "OK," he says, "don't forget," he says, "this is only going to be—we don't know, because we're just starting a second shift, and we don't know how long the job might last, OK?" It might be just a temporary thing for a couple of months, three months, whatever. "If you've got any other jobs going," he says, "kind of keep yourself," you know. This was like a temporary job.

DC: Don't burn your bridges, yeah.

SS: Well, forty-two years later, [laughs] I retired.

DC: Forty-two years later.

SS: Forty-two years. That was quite a temporary job! But I did—for the next couple years, I did keep my, my self in the grocery business.

DC: So you did a little bit of each?

SS: I went ahead and for awhile I still worked for the guy—he never used to come into the store until two, three o'clock in ther afternoon. So I came in, opened up in the morning, then I was working afternoons at Pontiac Motor.

DC: OK.

SS: So I kind of worked there . . .

DC: Left [the grocery store] in mid-afternoon . . .

SS: . . . and then—until he hired somebody else. And then I—I knew so many other people in the store business, I'd start working weekends in a meat counter. That was my specialty. I was working in the meat counter—I worked at Kroger's for awhile, I worked at Spadafore's Market. I got a couple little—you know, like that, that I knew different butchers and people that—they needed . . .

DC: Did you do that while you were still working at Pontiac Motor?

SS: So I said, well, I'm still—this is temporary, isn't it?

DC: Good point.

SS: [laughs] So, next thing you know, it was, yeah—then I got drafted in 1952, so I . . .

DC: Well, let's back up a second here. Uh, what job did you get hired in to do?

SS: On assembly. It was Plant 8 Assembly.

DC: Plant 8 Assembly. And what exactly were you doing?

SS: Well, OK, I got into an area where they called the front-end assembly, with the grilles and fenders, and the heat—all the heater assembly—what they called the front, front part of the radiator, two front fenders, and everything was all assembled together. So various jobs in there, you know, that I did.

DC: Yeah.

SS: Uh, from grilles, you know, did grilles—all the fancy grilles that they used to—Pontiac used to do back then, you know. That was a separate job. Then you'd, you know, on the side that put into, into the—what do you call—what they called the assembly box, where they put the fenders on there, the heater blowers, and then [?] . . .

DC: Would you have one specific task, or would you . . .

SS: No, I, I, I was pretty—they—I was pretty, uh, I don't know—I was quite versatile in there.

DC: OK, yeah.

SS: They would use me—uh, I don't know, wherever there was a problem, you know. That work was a snap for me.

DC: Yeah. You said it was kind of easy. Did it take long to learn how to do that?

SS: No—I don't know—I could—for me, it was, it was easy. Oh I—I worked—I can't tell you, almost every different job on there, you know.

DC: Yeah, in front-end assembly there.

SS: Yeah, from assembling heaters, heater [molders?] to checking radiators, and you know, for air test, assembling them on the, on the, on the line, the [bucks?], you know. They all had to be hooked into the framework or something. It was quite a, quite a—quite involved, OK? A lot of little different jobs in there that . . .

DC: So you were good at it. Did you like it?

SS: Huh?

DC: You said you were good at it. Did you like it?

SS: [loudly] Well I liked it. It was—OK, first of all, all of us—it was all of us—a lot of us were all young guys, nineteen, twenty. OK? OK, great. Then it was kind of, you know, fun! All helped each other, you know, and it was good cooperation among us.

DC: Did you know any of these guys beforehand?

SS: No. No. It was all, just all new, new people that you meet, all about that same age, you know. You know, within that, that framework.

DC: So how did you get along with your boss?

SS: Ah, never had any problem. Especially after he found out, one time I'm working in this supermarket, and it was on a Friday, and he, he went in there to buy something, you know, at the meat counter, like that. At the time I know, I remember telling him we were selling chicken very reasonable, at the time. That was our big come-on for the weekend. All of a sudden, he seen me, and says, "Don't we pay you enough at Pontiac Motors?" "That's only a temporary job there George!" [laughs] And he kind of, uh, treated me—you know, he treated me good before. I had always, you know—whatever it is. But it seemed like after that, after he seen that, it was, what was it—"You don't have a girlfriend?" I said, "No, I'm too *busy* to have a girlfriend." "You're not married?" and all that. [laughs] So why not—I had a pretty good job. OK, it was somewhat—at the time I was always an extra man—when somebody didn't show up, I took that job over.

DC: OK. That was . . .

SS: I was kind of an extra little person there, you know. And you'd just have [mumbles], not as a relief man, or something like that, but, um, you know, in between.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: You know.

DC: That way you got to learn . . .

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

SS: . . . go and be off in some other department every once in a while, when they needed somebody. And sometimes it wasn't all that good. I'd, you know—the body line work, getting under the—underneath the dashes and all this type of thing, wasn't the best.

DC: OK. You didn't like that?

SS: Huh? You know what I used to tell them, I said, "Hey, no more of that!" They give me one job there that you have to be an octopus [laughs].

DC: Was that the position you had to get your body in?

SS: Oh, you had to get under—in the dash, like, if something—you know, you had to get *in* there, and that—the body keeps *running*.

DC: Yeah, right, right.

SS: They keep running, and you gotta do something underneath it, underneath the dash like that. You know, there'd be no seats, you know, in there, at that point, you know. But oh, you'd have to, you know, you'd have to—at the time I was agile enough, but it was just—or else getting down in the *pits*, where you have to work putting the gasoline tanks in or something like this.

DC: Yeah, did you like it in the pits?

SS: No, no, "don't send me down there."

DC: What was the problem with that?

SS: That—if you was shorter, OK, OK—you know, if you were just [?] shorter, it would be—getting in a pit like that. That wasn't—it was a pit, OK, so I never, I never got put in there very often.

DC: So you could turn down those . . .

SS: Well, sometime I just told them, I said, "No more sending me down to the" so and so department, OK?

DC: And then they'd listen to you?

SS: Oh, the boss said—yeah, I never had any problems, because, you know . . .

DC: Would they send any of your co-workers out to these other departments as well?

SS: Well sometimes, a few of us—a lot, you know, it's funny—some people would never want to—they'd rather have a steady, something, routine. You know, [stutters a bit] I wanted to try, did everything, you know.

DC: Yeah.

SS: I used to, I guess—a few times they used to go ahead and, and, and check me out. You'd have some time-study people come around, on different jobs, and would always wonder why I could do better on this particular job than a person that was supposed to be *real* good. OK?

DC: So what do you think was going on?

SS: Well, uh, uh, probably [laughs] some of the people that probably worked there, they kind of maybe, they were, you know, they were good at their job, but they maybe kind of, uhhh, backed off on it. You know, I'd get on there, what they were doing, I'd stock up work, you know, and then I'd have time to—whatever, you know.

DC: Would anyone give you a hard time for being that much better?

SS: No, no, no. They just—no, no—a couple of—what, we had quite a bit of women worked there too, you know. Lot of ladies worked on that area, and they didn't like—they didn't like it.

DC: Why didn't they like it?

SS: Well, because, they felt that maybe that I was showing them up, and that I was—that I could go ahead and do the job, bank some work up. OK, it was kind of a—eh, you know, funny little thing going on with those gals like that on—you know, they—a lot of those assembly jobs you had little bitty screws, metal screws to assemble these heaters and grillework and that, so—and really, the gals were more, always seemed more adept on it, but—and they'd just go ahead, check up: "Well how come I can . . . ?" I could do it with a, with a—it's, it's, it's like the girls was doing it, you know. So, I don't know—there was a little—a couple of gals in, uh—it wasn't the night-shift gals, so much—the ones that worked days, ones that had been there for awhile, you know, that, you know, they had that seniority because—but the night shift, of course, was, you know, where the new ones, more the—so the day-shift gals didn't like that I, I was kind of showing them up, see? That was a little rub there. Why is this young, this young fellow doing and getting, producing more than I am, whatever, can do, you know, so that was a little rough there. The year I spent in assembly was—I would say, maybe, maybe the last six months, all these guys was starting to get drafted, see?

DC: OK, yeah.

SS: All the young guys, OK. Some of them were, you know, my age and that, but different areas where they was, their locals, I mean their, you know, draft locals were calling them up early, so the next thing you know, they replaced them with some older people, you know like, you know, a few of these people were maybe thirty years old! [being facetious] I mean, you know, *old* people.

DC: Thirty years old.

SS: [laughs heartily] You know what I mean?

DC: I know what you mean.

SS: I was nineteen or twenty, you know—a nineteen or twenty year old. And I remember people coming in there and telling these old people, that didn't want to—they wasn't as—what do you call?—co-op-e-ra-tive in working together.

DC: OK.

SS: Working as a, you know, as a bunch of us young guys, you know, we worked together, bank a little work here, get ahead, and maybe goof off a little bit, you know. [laughs]

DC: Sure. What would you do when you were goofing off?

SS: Huh?

DC: What would you do . . .

SS: [high-pitched] Oh, just, oh, nothing. You're just, just relax, OK? The line is going, you're putting the work that is done—just kind of, you know. Of course if we want to go ahead and visit somebody, well then we'd—a few of us would cover for the guy that wanted to visit somebody someplace else. It was a very cooperative type of a thing amongst us.

DC: And then these thirty year olds . . .

SS: [loudly] And they—OK, maybe it's thirty, maybe some of them, OK, whatever.

DC: They were older, anyway.

SS: Older anyhow, in age. They didn't want to—you couldn't get—they didn't want to cooperate. You get six of us working together, and then they put one guy in there that didn't want to, OK?

DC: It doesn't work.

SS: It didn't work. They didn't want to—he didn't want to work a little bit harder to get ahead. But they—to bank a little bit of work. But there you go. You had—it takes but one out of a half a dozen that didn't want to play the game.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: That was a—could have got a little—it got—before I got drafted it was kind of, you know, was, wasn't, you lose what they call the gang, anyway, you know.

DC: Sounds like it wasn't as much fun.

SS: No, no, no. It started losing its—what do you call it?—thinking about wanting to go to work—"Oh, here it is. It's going to be another day here," you know, that you got that problem with somebody, you know.

DC: Was it a physically difficult job?

SS: No, I can't say it was, physically, no.

DC: You were young.

SS: Well, I was young, OK. It wasn't—no, it wasn't nothing physically demanding, or whatever. You know—if you was staying on one particular job for every day, every day, it could get quite, get quite boring.

DC: Did you join the union in that period?

SS: Oh yeah, had to [mumbles].

DC: Was your father in the union?

SS: My father, my father was one of those sit-down strikers in 1936!

DC: OK, all right.

SS: OK, so he was union all the way.

DC: He was still—was he still at Fisher Body at that point?

SS: Huh?

DC: Was he still at Fisher Body?

SS: Yeah, oh yeah. Definitely. He was Fisher Body in 1936.

DC: So he was involved in the organizing effort there.

SS: Yep, yeah. Whatever, when the union was—he was part of the—what they call?—when they sit—they always call the one in Flint, was the big sit-down strike, but they did have it at Fisher Body at that time. He was active in, in the union like that, you know.

DC: So did you join right away when you took the job at Pontiac Motor?

SS: Well I guess—I don't know—you had, yes—you did, OK, at the time, you, you did, OK.

DC: When you were on that assembly job, did you ever have any need to use the union?

SS: [short pause, then softly] No.

DC: Call a committeeman? Or anything like that?

SS: No I never—no, never had no real, real problem, OK?

DC: Uh huh, yeah.

SS: You know, if you don't [?].

DC: Did you ever talk to your Dad about, uh, his experiences with the union?

SS: Well, I don't know. When my Dad was always—while my Dad was very, very staunch union, of course, because he, uh, because he had worked in the shop in the pre-union days.

DC: Uh huh.

SS: And he knew a lot of things that went on before, before the union, you know.

DC: What did he say about the differences?

SS: Oh, well, a lot of difference there. I mean, he used to say, I mean, how they, you know, pit one worker against another, and you know, uh, and oh, it was just, you know, you go ahead—if it was piecework, and you didn't—whatever happened in any part of the plant, I mean, whatever—OK, you punch out at so-and-so time, but then to get your, to get your twelve-hours' pay, or whatever, you know—ten, twelve hours was quite, quite a thing, when they was going. And then you got to working until you get your quota in, you know, a piecework type of thing that you—and whatever happens, something goes down, whatever, you have to get [talking over each other]

DC: You're off the clock . . .

SS: . . . like I say, my Dad spent a lot of—with the various plants, the places he worked for, before union days, was quite—one of the things that I always remember—this Tony Anthony, that my Dad—friend . . .

DC: The Italian guy?

SS: . . . at the grocery store, OK. Uh, he was a metal finisher on one side of the car, my Dad on the other, you know. Boss used to go up to my Dad—you know what he says? "That dago." He says, "You can outdo him any day." You know, I mean, then he'd go to Tony, tell Tony, says, "That Polack over there . . ." He says, you know—[stuttering] and of course, my Dad, my Dad and Tony rode, rode to work together [laughs]. They knew that type of stuff that went on, you know, pitting one person against another, you know, like, you know. You know, that was one of the things I'll always remember, my Dad was telling me about him and Tony having this type of a thing going on, between the boss trying to get . . .

DC: The boss assumed the didn't talk, I guess.

SS: It was a, it was a, it was a funny deal up there. But over, you know—like, you know—it was, oh, at different plants, you know, that my Dad had worked for, oh there was—they just—used to be that one of the, one of the favorite things was, uh, work you just enough time that you didn't have seniority or something, OK. Even though it wasn't union, they—but they worked [pause] and that was always a thing that went on with, with the industry, you know. They'd just hire and hire people just for enough time to do a certain—at a certain segment of what needs to be done, and they would need a lot more people, then they'd get them.

DC: So they could get rid of them at any time they wanted.

SS: Yeah, right, you know—there was no, uh, you know, no, no thing about any seniority, any rights or anything. You just—and that's why when my Dad did get—even before the union come to Fisher Body—that's when he said, they just hired me back, you know. Hey! Because he—that was, that was unusual.

DC: Loyalty meant something to him then.

SS: Yes. So it was an unusual situation that he got into, that he was as loyal to Fisher Body [laughs]. Even after he got into the skilled trades, you know, down the road there, they'd, they'd have—there would be changeover time, and uh, my Dad would say, "Well," you know, about vacation, you know, we could have vacation, you know—he said, my Dad would say, "No, if they needed—"—you know, they was working over—they were doing the changeover—my Dad would go ahead and cancel his vacation, because he had a thing in his mind that, if there's work to be, if there's work to be done, I'm going to do it. So he lost a lot, out, by not taking vacations with the family, with us.

DC: Did you ever go on vacations without him?

SS: Well, we used to go up North, or whatever. We'd take vacations, because, you know, my mother wanted to go up North to see her parents, and visit family and whatever. That used to be our vacations, basically. But you know, my Dad had this bit about—of course, he'd take vacations later in the fall, or say in the winter and fall. We didn't take . . .

DC: When you were in school.

SS: So he always had—he just—and down the road he did say, you know, he says, "You kids has always been so close to Mom," and whatever. Well, because you, you was so dedicated to your job, you know. And he was. He was—he—that's the way he was. OK, he, he grew up in an era that he, he felt that he had a good job. He was *devoted* to it. Very, very much so. But, too much so, you know. A lot of people say, even today, they get devoted to their jobs and they just forget that there's life, other life than your, than your work all the time, you know. He was a workaholic, there, there's no doubt about that.

DC: Did that have an influence on you and how you organized your life?

SS: Oh, I don't know—no, I guess not. No.

DC: OK.

SS: No. Because I have done things absolutely counter, absolutely counter to my Dad. My Dad would—he always—he started because of so many years, he had these different jobs, he worked nights. Nights.

DC: Because he lost his seniority, or . . .

SS: Because, because if he got a new, a different job, he—it was in a different classification, right? He had to work nights. Well he got used to nights, see? And, and he just never—one time while I was in the service, he had enough seniority at this time to go days. Well, that year—at the time—he had to go ahead and take it for a year. OK, you know. He could bump on, you know. My mother used to write me when I was in Korea, that, "it's one miserable time with your Dad on days." Uh, "because Dad is so used to," he was, you know, he was so used to—and my mother, of course, she was used to my Dad being on nights too, you know, you know. And she said, it was just one [?] Dad—he—his eating habits, and everything—his sleeping habits. It was just upside down. It had been so programmed into him, and because of my Dad worked nights, I made sure that when—I'm not going to be stuck into this, into working nights. And different times I could have done—changed my thing, even when I got, you know, skilled trades whatever. I could have, I could have taken different jobs but I'd have to work nights. I said, "No. I've got a family. I'm raising a family. They come first." Said I—[mumbles]—that was a different thing that I did, other than my Dad.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: I, I worked most of my forty-two years, I worked most of it on days.

DC: When you were working that assembly job, before you went in the service, were you still living at home?

SS: Oh yeah. I was still—I was still—I was single. Oh yeah Oh yeah, I was still single and, oh yeah.

DC: So—go ahead. I'm sorry. Oh, I thought you were saying something. Um, so tell me, you got drafted, and where did they send you? Where did you go?

SS: What?

DC: You said you got drafted.

SS: Yeah, I got drafted, OK.

DC: And so you had to leave your job.

SS: Oh yeah, had to take a leave, leave of absence.

DC: Right. But where did you go?

SS: Well, went in and I trained at Camp Pickett, Virginia, in a medical, bit.

DC: What was your—what were they slotting you to do?

SS: Well, it was, it was medical—medical tech, whatever—corpsman, really, whatever, at the time, in basic training. Everybody is an infantryman first.

DC: Yeah.

SS: Whatever, the first eight weeks you'd do infantry and then I was, uh, in the medical, OK?

DC: Why do you suppose they put you there?

SS: Uh, I don't know. It was always a funny thing, because, you know, you take all these tests and whatever, and my real resume, I mean, from what I had in school, was *mechanical*.

DC: Yeah, that's right. That's what I was thinking.

SS: Mechanical!

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: OK, who knows? OK? Who knows? [laughs]

DC: They must have just had a need there. Who knows?

SS: So anyhow, they put me in the medics. OK? So after I finished the, with that, then the next thing you know, they wanted to send me to medical school.

DC: Oh really? Hmm.

SS: You know, you take these tests, and—so from what I got right out of basic there, in Camp Pickett, they sent me to Fort Sam Houston [a medical training center]. And they gave me another test there, and I had to make some decisions. No, I'm not, I'm not, I'm not medical-based, I don't think. I just, I didn't, I just didn't want to go into it, OK? Because I'd have to—I was, being a draftee, I had to go in there, and if I went to medical training, I'd have to go ahead and re-up, for extra years, or whatever you do the schooling.

DC: Right, right, right. Yeah.

SS: So then they sent me to school as—for a EMT technician, at Percy Jones Hospital in Battle Creek [Michigan].

DC: Oh, OK. Yeah. So you're in the service, but you're in Battle Creek?

SS: Yeah, right. Yeah.

DC: OK.

SS: I went to, you know, I went to Battle Creek there, and I was doing my training there, and I'm going to be a permanent party. Right? I'm going to replace somebody who's—you know—it's time to get out of the service, you know? And I'm going to be placed . . .

DC: Stay there at Battle Creek, you think?

SS: [mumbles] So I'm going to school there—only had school four hours a day in the morning, so I'd drive back and forth from Battle Creek to home, you know. Bought myself some new tires on my car, bought myself some new clothes, civilian clothes. I'm going to go ahead and be, you know, permanent, permanent duty there. All of a sudden, I get the call I got to go up to personnel. I'd just finished my school. Just finished it. And I was going to wait, wait for the time when this other person was leaving. All of sudden I was called to personnel, he says, "Mr. Strzelecki, I don't know what's going on here, but we've got some bad news for you. You're heading for [some sort of acronym, Freecom?], Far East Command. And the orders were destination Evil.

DC: Destination what?

SS: Destination Evil.

DC: Evil.

SS: Korea!

DC: Korea is evil.

SS: OK—that was the order.

DC: I didn't realize that was the code name.

SS: Yeah, that was it. The Far East Command, Destination Evil.

DC: Wow.

SS: And so . . .

DC: What year was this now? I'm losing track of time. What year was this?

SS: This was in '52.

DC: '52, OK.

SS: Yeah.

DC: There we go. All right. Now I'm back on track.

SS: [laughs softly]

DC: So that was a shocker.

SS: Oh! . . .

DC: . . . your EMT training . . .

SS: Huh?

DC: You were in the EMT training . . .

SS: EN, EN, ENT. Eyes, ears, nose, and throat.

DC: Oh ears, nose throat. Ears, no throat, OK.

SS: ENT technician.

DC: ENT, OK. I was thinking emergency.

SS: No no. ENT.

DC: ENT, OK. And then they yank you out and send you to Korea.

SS: Yeah, and then all of a sudden . . .

DC: Were you doing ENT work in Korea?

SS: Well no, that's a whole new story [laughs].

DC: OK, let me have it.

SS: Yeah, OK, anyhow, they processed me and that was—and then I left for Korea in November of '52.

DC: OK. So what's the story here?

SS: Well then I got to Korea—well then I—they uh—well they didn't have any job—the first unit I was put in was a, was a, a [snapping fingers] hospital unit, you know. Not a MASH hospital [sighs]—oh, I'm losing it right there.

DC: That's OK.

SS: Evacuation hospital, OK. Evacuation hospital, OK. And I got in that evacuation hospital on Christmas Day.

DC: OK.

SS: In 1952. Of course, evacuation hospital, you don't have no ENT or stuff like that. That's—it's a evacuation hospital—it's a—it's either working in a pre-op, you know, doing—or post-op, or you know that type of work, you know. So they took a look at my records and says, "Well, we don't have really anyplace for you except we can go ahead and put you—take care of the"—uh, what they call them?—hospital, it was what they

called keeping them—it was cold up there—it was pretty cold there—taking care of the heat and the heating of the things, you know. [sarcastically] Oh, that's a fancy job, yeah, for me. [laughs] You know, they use you wherever they want you at the time.

DC: [talking over each other a bit] So you trained in ENT, then they have you in charge of the heat. [louder] They trained you in ENT and then they put you in charge of the heat.

SS: [loudly] Well yeah, well that was a job, that, you know—I told them, I said—they didn't want to put me in any, you know---some of the other work that had to be done there, maybe, in the hospital, so anyhow, they had me taking care of the heating for the doggone, the hospital, you know, all the tents. OK, so I'm doing that for awhile, and next thing you know, they asked me, you know, went to them to check my records, and he said, "We got an opening for you in—do you want to go ahead and work in the motor pool?" :No." "Why? We," you know, we "could use somebody there." So I, "OK, I'll try that." Well then, I went in there, and then I had a little [dust-up?] with that first sergeant.

DC: OK, what happened?

SS: Well, we had a little—nobody wears rank—at the time we was there we didn't wear rank. And we was in the club one night, and this guy just kind of was getting a little pushy every once in awhile—next thing you know, I pushed back and next thing you know we had a little fight. Well guess where I went?

DC: Um, probably to the brig. [laughs]

SS: Huh? No no. He didn't do that. But he-I just got put on what they call ["interim"?] to the front line.

DC: Oh, OK, the front line.

SS: So I was—you know, then they sent me to what they call a "replacement depot." From there I went to the front lines, from the replacement depot, and then I went to the 25th Division, 25th Medics, as a Corpsman. That's what my original MOS [Military Occupation Specialty] would be right when I got out of basic, was a Corpsman, not a—you know. So I'm up there as a Corpsman. Went on patrol with the—right there in the front lines, you know.

DC: Wow. What was that like?

SS: Uh, it wasn't good. [laughs nervously]

DC: Yeah.

SS: The first week or so, oh yeah, you know, the shelling and all the stuff that was going on, you know—I mean, the shelling was so, so—and the guys would tell me, "Oh this isn't bad now." You could go ahead and—it was so bright, you could read, you could read at night.

DC: At night, wow.

SS: It was so—that harassing fire there, you could just read the paper or anything.

DC: And they said that wasn't bad?

SS: Huh?

DC: And they said that wasn't bad.

SS: Yeah, the guys was saying—old-timers then—and of course, you always just had this funny feeling. You'd try to eat, and you wouldn't want to go down. But you know—the guys who had been there for awhile would laugh at you, so after a couple of weeks, it—I got used to it. But it was always kind of—we'd go out there—it was—not really that much fighting going on. We'd go out there on reconnaissance patrol. Being that I was the medic, you had to go out with, you know [mumbles]. Then, you kind of get used to it. One day after I had been there for a couple weeks, "Oh, I gotta go and check your records." Always gotta check records. And everything was law at that time. The—there was—it was going to have that little switch. It was in '53. Gonna go ahead and do a little bit of, what they call, gonna—the actual big fighting was gonna stop, and they're gonna have some truce at that time, the first time. So I—I gotta go back a couple miles back to company headquarters, you know—had to check on my records, or do something like that. But—took me back there, and I walked into this camp and whatever type of unit there—walked up there, this guy looks at me, says, "Strzelecki! What in the heck are you doing here?" He was a guy I took basic training with, went on a—and he knew that I was going to be stateside. And he was a guy that was from Bay City, and he was a clerk there. So he had been there ever since he got out of basic. He'd been to Korea. Says, "What are you doing here?" I told him the whole story. He says, "You don't want to"—he says, "We're"—he says, "We've got so many people up here now," he says, "we don't need them and we don't know what to do with them. Tell you what." He says, "We're, we're way over [T-O-N-A?]"—troops up on the, whatever, Army that—you know. "You know what? We're sending people back," he said. "You're going to be one of them."

DC: Whoa.

SS: I said, "Back where?" He says, "I'm going to send you back," he says, "into Seoul." He says, "That'll be a nice place for you," he says . . .

DC: To where?

SS: To Seoul, Korea.

DC: To Seoul, yeah.

SS: To Seoul. He said, "They have a nice unit there. The 121st Evacuation Hospital." "Oh, well, OK." Two days later I'm on a truck. I went back to Seoul. That's where I spent the next, uh, oh the rest of my time—must have been [counting] almost ten months. No,

eight months, that I spent in a evacuation hospital there, where I didn't go ahead and work as a medic.

DC: You didn't? What did you do?

SS: Mechanic.

DC: OK, you worked as a mechanic.

SS: Went in and worked as a mechanic for about a month or two, and the motor, motor sergeant was rotating, and the person—a person who had to replace the motor sergeant had—under whatever thing, M-O-Ses that the Army had, could be a mechanic. Not a driver, or something. I'm Motor Sergeant. As a *PFC*, I'm a Motor Sergeant—which they made me Corporal real quick, after that [laughs]. Boy I had a nice duty there.

DC: Night duty?

SS: Nice duty there. I ended up taking care—well, as I was a mechanic, that was right down my line. When, when they asked me, you know, about working in a hospital or—what the heck, you know—unit, "How come here you're, you got mechanics classes in high school. How come . . . " I said, "I don't know." Because they—the Army does some funny things.

DC: That would have been the natural place for you to start.

SS: Yeah, right. So I went ahead and I—come from, like I say, from the motor pool I went right down at that time, and I worked—I worked real hard on it. I got vehicles off the line right away, you know. It was deadline—needed work on it, and I did that right away. Oh, I put a lot of hours in.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: So then the next thing you know—I didn't know that it was even expected that I was going to that, but all of a sudden, First Sergeant calls me and he says, says, "So and so is being rotated, and," he says, "you're the next in line to go ahead and be Motor Sergeant." "What? What? I'm only a . . . " "Don't, don't worry. Don't worry." He says, "You'll be Corporal," he says, "in the next month." "Oh!" That sounded pretty good.

DC: Moving up the ranks here.

SS: Hell, right there, real quick. So I had a real good, real good rapport there with that unit.

DC: It sounds like you did good work for them too.

SS: Oh, I did—oh yeah, definitely. I mean, it was just right down my line of work, really, that I liked, you know, to work on those vehicles. In fact, let me see, about, oh, let's see, it was about December of '53 that they—I was approached about extending my time of enlistment.

DC: Did you consider it?

SS: At the time, everything was going quite well for me. So I said, "Well we'll see. Look into it." But when they looked into it, to extend it for another year, I didn't have—I had so much vacation time coming, that it wasn't worth it sending me back to the States, taking my leave time, OK, and then coming back to Korea. So that fell through, and I, I just—then I got out. Out, out, out.

DC: So when did you enter the service?

SS: February of '52.

DC: And when did you get out?

SS: February of '54.

DC: OK, so you served two years.

SS: I had to serve my . . .

DC: Were you in Korea all the way until February of '54?

SS: Uh, just about—within, within, oh, let's say [sighs], within ten, maybe ten, twelve days. Whatever time it took—about—because I got out a day before—I mean I was—whatever, before I went in, I went in on February 20. I think I got out, whatever, like, whenever. But they hurried us through, and whatever, got back. Got back real quick-like.

DC: So where did you go when you came back to the States?

SS: Well, right off—I'm kind of getting my—go back home! After fourteen months away, I said, "Hey," and kicked myself, "what am I going to do now?" I thought I was going to use my, maybe my GI Bill, and I was going to go ahead and maybe go to college.

DC: Yeah.

SS: And I found out that when I went to the high school to see—get my records—well the stuff I had in high school under the Industrial Arts, I didn't have enough to take me—to get me into college.

DC: OK.

SS: So anyways, I could get—I got three years of college coming from the GI Bill. And I says, by the time I got, whatever, I said—it wasn't going to work out financially, period, you know. So I [?] that, whatever, so, I'm going to see if I can get back and get into trade school. So I went ahead and seen the same person I seen in '49—the Superintendent of our Pontiac Motor Trade School, Fred Volker, and he says, "Well," he says, "what you have to do, I'll get your records from high school. You get"—whatever, and you know,

"we'll see what they're doing." And he kind of had a memory, something like that, that I'd—so I told him who I had and what in high school. And he says, "Well," he says, "you know," he says, "all these guys that went into the service under the National Guard, they're coming back," he says, "so I—it's kind of iffy maybe, you know, if I have an opening." So, so whatever. And I went to high school. I got my records. He's checking over it. He says, "One thing about it," he says, "where'd"—you know, about where I worked. I told him I worked at Pontiac Motor. So he says, what it is, he says, "Come back to work. You can have work someplace, aren't you?" I said, "No." He says, "But it's easier for me to transfer you than to hire you in *new*."

DC: This would have been your original assembly job?

SS: Yeah, so the next thing you know, I went right back into assembly work. And meanwhile I'm waiting for whatever I hear from my, from the trade school. So every day I went in to work, go in, I says, go in the office of the trade school, say, "Hear anything?" or whatever. Nothing. Nothing.

DC: How long did that go on?

SS: That went on, oh [short pause] about six weeks or something like that. You know, I waited—you know I have three months to get back to work after your [discharge], so think I went back to work, way into March maybe, or something like that. And then I, uh, I got everything—I went to the high school, got—had them make sure all the records were right. Went back to Fred Volker. He had them. So I'm checking in every day. "Hear anything." And I knew the clerk there—I mean, I was going in there all the time—"No, nothing today. Didn't hear anything. Didn't hear anything." So this—back on assembly—one day when I went there, and says, I ask, you know, and he says, and he says, "No, we," he says, "we haven't heard anything from the school in," you know, "quite a while," you know. And kind of—I kind of felt something going [shooo sound], whatever. Anyhow, went to work that day, you know [mumbles], I'm working—work for an hour or so, the boss come up to me—he's got his hands behind his back like that, you know. OK, and they're watching me. [mumbles] Said, "I don't know if you really care to do this, but I've got something here," he says, "you know, you might not want to sign it." Going to trade school. He says, "What in the heck—what happened there, Steve?" I said, "Well," I said—he didn't know. The boss didn't—I didn't tell the boss there what I was doing. "No," he said "I put in for—anyhow, you're lucky," he says. "You're going to start in trade school Monday," you know. [?] So I started in trade school.

DC: And how was that?

SS: Huh?

DC: How was trade school?

SS: Excellent.

DC: Yeah? What did you like about it?

SS: Well, I mean it was quite—you know, meanwhile I was going over there, you know, for tool-making. I went in as a toolmaker.

DC: Toolmaker, OK.

SS: Yeah, toolmaker.

DC: Did you start out as a toolmaker, or did you have to do all sorts of things?

SS: Oh no, oh no, you got to go ahead and run all, all machinery. You gotta know every—you know, you gotta lathe, metal machine shaper, uh, you know, boring mills, grinders, heat treat—you had to go to night school also.

DC: Night school also?

SS: Oh yeah, definitely.

DC: And where was the night school?

SS: Oh, went to—at Pontiac, Pontiac High.

DC: Pontiac High, OK.

SS: There's the courses that they had, you know, teaching there, you know, design work and, uh, more math, drawing, more drawing, you know, in the design area, and then when I fulfilled that, and then I took a, one course at Lawrence Tech as advanced draw—advanced—trying to think—advanced design, advanced drawing. It was different, uh, [stutters, hard to decipher] and all the stuff, you know. Real kind of, different, you know. Because I'd taken everything in high school already. I had—at night school, so I just took something to fill in. I was still going to school, OK?

DC: Right, right.

SS: I had to take something, so I took one small course there. And by that time I'm ready to get out.

DC: So when you were at trade school, were you one of the younger ones?

SS: No, I was probably right in—no, I wasn't—I wasn't any—OK, they had, they had some that was just a little bit younger than me—because at the time I was twenty-three—

DC: Right.

SS: OK, so there was younger ones in there.

DC: Uh huh.

SS: Those guys that went in there with that—they were called—they was called up, drafted—drafted at the time, they was being drafted you know, and a lot of things. And then of

course they had some of these guys that was coming back that was my age. So it was, you know, yeah, yeah.

DC: How long was the trade school?

SS: Well I went in—once I started, May 1 of '54, got out, uh, December, middle of December, before Christmas, of '57.

DC: OK, so it's a good long program.

SS: Well, it's supposed to be like, you know, say, almost four years. But it's so many hours—you have so many hours.

DC: Yeah, so many hours—you could get out a bit earlier. And so, uh, when you were in trade school, were you living at home? Were you living somewhere else?

SS: Well, I was living at home until I got married in '56.

DC: Oh, you got married in '56, OK.

SS: Then I got married in '56.

DC: All right, well tell me about that. Where did you meet your wife?

SS: Well, in 1954, when I got out of the service, in February, a uncle of mine—my mother's youngest brother—which I was close to like that—and they had a birthday party for my uncle's wife—she had a sister that came over here. And he—she was from England—my uncle's wife, see, he married her during the Second World in England.

DC: OK, all right.

SS: OK, so she was having her baby sister come over to visit, and it was her birthday party, OK? And so I just got out—I was only a couple of days from the service at the time—and I was invited to the party, so I went down there, and that's where I met her. You know, but I wasn't ready to—whatever. And then I—a few months later I dated her. My uncle used to always go drop into my mother's, if he'd been up north or something, you know, and this—my wife used to go along, OK? I think she moved in with them. And I met her different times—different times, you know. And I dated her. Next thing you know [laughs].

DC: Was she planning on staying for awhile.

SS: Well no. At the time she was only here on a, what they call, like a certain type of, visitor's, a visa—she was only going to stay here for maybe a year.

DC: OK.

SS: That was her initial intent. She came over here in '53, and I didn't know, I mean—I knew that she—well my—that my uncle had her—his wife's sister come over. I left her

the mail and all that, you know. And I just, whatever, didn't pay too much attention, you know, definitely. You know, she came over in '53—she was supposed to go back in '54. Of course, anyhow, she didn't. She was going to school then too. And she just kind of extended it.

DC: Officially? Or unofficially?

SS: Well, well you have to do it—you have to do it, you know, when you get a visa—if you, you know, come over, whatever. Well, it was permanent, but not permanent. She thought she was going to stay here about a year. OK, that's about, you know—she's the baby of the family, and her mother and Dad wouldn't have the baby, you know, going here to America, you know, whatever.

DC: Sure, yeah

SS: It was—so then she—took her out for awhile, and then, uh, '55 we got engaged, but then she still said, "Well, I want to go back home to see my Mama and Dad." And so she went. Before anything was going to happen, she went back home for a couple months, come back—and we started making wedding plans! [laughs]

DC: Wow. OK, yeah. So what were you thinking when she went back to visit her Mom an Dad?

SS: Well she did—I said, "Oh, she's got to make a choice in life," you know, right? You know, I mean—homesick, you know, no doubt. It's been almost, you know, two years since she'd been here—it had already been two years, OK. '53 to '55, so she had to go home to see if she wanted to adapt herself to *America*.

DC: That's a big decision.

SS: Yep, it was a big decision for her, yeah, definitely.

DC: Wow. So you got married in '56.

SS: '56.

DC: OK. And then, where did you live.

SS: Well then I bought a house about a couple miles from where I grew up, really.

DC: OK.

SS: Bought a house on the GI Bill.

DC: OK, yeah. And you were in trade school at the time.

SS: And I was still in trade school, yes.

DC: And what as your wife doing?

SS: Well, my wife got pregnant right away.

DC: Oh, OK, ok.

SS: [laughs]

DC: And so your first-born would have been about . . .

SS: I had twin, twin boys.

DC: Twin boys, OK. That was a load. Was that, what, early ’57?

SS: Early ’57, yeah.

DC: OK.

SS: June of ’57.

DC: June of ’57, OK.

SS: Yep.

DC: OK, so you bought a house, got married, and had twins, all within about a year and a half here.

SS: Right, it was . . .

DC: That’s a lot. And also you’re in trade school.

SS: Yeah, still going to trade school.

DC: Wow. And actually about to finish up at that point.

SS: Oh yeah, even before I even got married I found us a—you know, they wasn’t paying too much at that time.

DC: OK, that was one of my questions, yeah. How . . .

SS: Yeah, it wasn’t paying, because don’t forget it was—after awhile, the union, when the union dropped in out of the trade [stutters, false starts]—they were in the trade school, but it was non-union.

DC: Non-union.

SS: It was non-union. No, they wouldn’t have union representation like apprentices did.

DC: Ah.

SS: OK, so when you started out in the trade school back then, the wages wasn't—it was lower than a sweeper's.

DC: Really? So you basically gave up your union membership for awhile?

SS: Oh you had to, yeah, yeah—it was just an automatic thing, you know.

DC: But once you got out of trade school, weren't you back in the union?

SS: Yep.

DC: Yeah. You had to . . .

SS: Yeah right [?]

DC: Oh, OK.

SS: But that interim in the trade school, that's a . . .

DC: When did the trade school become a union operation?

SS: Well, it's—I—I really don't—it would have had to have been about four or five years after I got out, something like that. Where, where they start—they split the trade school into that—you did the apprenticeship out in the plant. But when I—the trade school that I went to, it was a separate building, by itself, with separate—separate supervisors, you know, in your area of your training. So it was unique in a sense. It was probably the last of all trade schools that was that way. They used to be—the Henry Ford trade school, I guess, used to be that way. It was separate.

DC: Separate.

SS: Yeah, and you trained separately before you went—and then when this here happened, uh, I mean Pontiac Motor was considered to be the next nice trade school. OK? That's the way they figured—the different people that I've talked to in different areas—"Oh, Pontiac Motor Trade School. Who do you know to get into Pontiac Motor Trade School?" That was kind of a, you know . . .

DC: It's a big deal.

SS: It was just like when you went into the Ford Trade School that you had to—there was certain requirements, hey, you know?

DC: But your requirement had really just been the good fortune of . . .

SS: Well, I got—my records was good. I was told that my high school attendance, my high school grades, and what I had . . .

DC: But still there was some suspense with that group of . . .

SS: Yeah, right. OK, yeah.

DC: Reserves, yeah.

SS: Yeah, right, there always was that.

DC: It wasn't a given.

SS: [laughs]

DC: So anyways, I mean, that was quite a time, I would imagine, because you're in trade school, not making a lot of money, but you're buying a house, uh, you've got a new wife, you've got twins—how are you getting by at that point?

SS: Get another part-time job. [laughs]

DC: Oh you did, OK. All right. What was that? What did you do?

SS: I worked for a small job shop, like, you know. Wasn't supposed to do nothing—that was frowned upon—after you get—after I had some, you know, I worked there, I knew how to . . .

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

DC: . . . in trade school?

SS: Oh yeah, you're doing it evenings.

DC: And did you do that after out got out of trade school too?

SS: Uh no. I didn't.

DC: OK.

SS: No, I didn't. Oh I did quite a bit later on, that I went to work again, but it wasn't at that time. Got out of trade school, of course, got some *bucks*.

DC: OK, so your wages went up then

SS: Oh! Yes, you're a journeyman!

DC: Yeah, right, right.

SS: You're a journeyman, OK.

DC: So that took some of the financial pressure off then?

SS: Oh yes, yes, definitely.

DC: So um, did you feel like you could live comfortably at that point?

SS: Well I—it's still, you know—I mean, I'm starting, you know, with a new family and it was kind of, you know, you don't over—uh, what do you call?—spend. Always been kind of, what they call, conservative. There was no credit cards then, like plastic and all that.

DC: Right.

SS: You bought something, you bought it ninety days same as cash—either you're going to have the money or you'd just buy it.

DC: That's right, yeah.

SS: You didn't extend yourself. You had a house, and that's it, you know.

DC: Did you have a garden?

SS: Huh?

DC: Did you have a garden?

SS: No, no, no, no, no, no. Didn't have to do that then. No.

DC: Well, tell me about your first job when you got out of trade school.

SS: Well, they didn't—OK, at that time, they didn't have room for me in the tool room. But they put me in tool inspection, OK. In '58, so—that was—and I got out, you know, in December I got out, and they put me in tool inspection. Uh, it wasn't—you know, OK—they said well—what I wanted to do at the time, and I—I wanted to get into the engineering machine shop, OK.

DC: You knew that at the time.

SS: I—yeah—I [stuttering a bit] knew that [?] people were going there, and they had openings, OK, but, uh, the powers to be at the time says they need people in tool inspection. So I went into tool inspection.

DC: What exactly is tool inspection?

SS: Well, OK, you inspect, oh, tools that—everything that they use in the manufacturing process, you know. On the assembly line, you got, oh, many types of tools, fixtures, you know, jigs . . .

DC: Did this happen on a regular basis or when there was a problem . . .

SS: No, they had something new that would come in, or—they'd bring it in there, and you'd have to inspect it. And they also would in even parts that you had to qualify—maybe heads, a block, crankshafts, you know. So tool inspection was a little bit more than just tools, but if there was a problem with a tool on the line, they wanted to know—you'd check a part, tell what's wrong with the part, then he says, "OK, this part was not machined right," and it went back to the check room, and they had to take a fixture out, then check that.

DC: So you would double-check and troubleshoot.

SS: So t was like—it was quite a—it was good enough, you know, that the job was quite, uh, involved in the tool inspection like that. But they kept you in a room, and I don't know—at the time I, I still wanted to go ahead and get on machines. I just had that feeling about, you know, machine stuff. But '58 was a bad year for General Motors, and at Pontiac Motors.

DC: Right.

SS: It was a down year. We lost—and in Plant 9 where I worked. I worked in Plant 9—they used to have short workweeks, OK. So on a short workweek, my seniority would take me and put me for three days in Plant 9—that's tool inspection—then they put me two days working on the assembly line, because I had my seniority—it could be used to go back to the assembly line. Well two days I'd go back to get a full *week* in, you know.

DC: Yeah, right.

SS: See? As a toolmaker—or, you know—they didn't send me back to the low wages. Just said I went for the two days, and it was the union agreement that I had *rights*—I had seniority rights back there. So I never, I never lost work—I mean I never lost time because of the bad—it was a bad year.

DC: So you weren't laid off at all.

SS: No, no. I wasn't laid off. Oh no, I wasn't laid off.

DC: A lot of people were, so . . .

SS: That was '58, was—and then, by the end of '58, the gun job folded up.

DC: The gun job, OK.

SS: Yeah, we had a gun job there. We was making guns for the, for the Army, and Air Force, whatever, the whole service.

DC: How did that affect you?

SS: Well, all these people—they laid that off—all these people had more seniority. They had come from Plant 9 previously to go on the gun job. So it ended up that I didn't have no

room in the tool room—no seniority in the tool room, because, you know, they had too many people. Tool inspection—they took the inspector from the gun job. And, so what they did, is they put me in the die room.

DC: OK.

SS: As a machinist, because I, because I was a trade school graduate—uh, you—recognized that I could run a mill, shaper, [?], and replace any trainees—so they had trainees on the . . .

DC: So you would bump them?

SS: So I would bump a *trainee*.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: So I was—I started doing that—that was in first week of January, 1959.

DC: OK.

SS: And I started working in the die room.

DC: How did you like that?

SS: Oh it—I liked it—first of all, it's the first time I ever put in any overtime. I worked the first week I was there, we worked a Saturday—son of a gun! I mean, this is *bucks*. You know. [laughs]

DC: Yeah.

SS: Never had—and the previous year, there were, you know—there wasn't no overtime, you know. Usually, they always say you get in the skilled trades—my Dad was always, you know, in Fishers—you know, you always work overtime. Well, if you're a toolmaker, diemaker, whatever, you, you know, at Fisher you got overtime. I never *had* any of this—so if I had started there—and son of a gun, working a Saturday. "Oh boy!"

DC: What did you do with the money?

SS: [Excited and loud] What did I do? I didn't have it—OK, that first week—I mean, they don't . . .

DC: I know, but I mean you got some overtime at this point . . .

SS: And the next week I had to go ahead and renege that overtime practically, because I had to take a day off because my youngest son was born [laughs].

DC: Oh, OK. All right.

SS: My youngest son was born, the second week in January.

DC: So do you have the three kids? Are there any . . .

SS: I had two, had two, and then I got three.

DC: Three total.

SS: And I got the third boy. So that was in January. In January of '59.

DC: Yeah, yeah. So you had to give up your overtime that week.

SS: Oh yeah—had to miss it, but whatever. But anyhow, I still . . .

DC: Well, how long did you stay in there in the die room?

SS: So then I—in the die room, I, um—OK. Previous to this, before it was even slacking off in—the writing was on the wall, what was happening—I went to the employment office, and I, uh, said, "Hey, I know they're," you know, "I know people in engineering, that they're hiring," OK? Uh, "I'd like to—I've heard rumors," I said, "I've heard rumors that you have to—to go to engineering you have to quit, uh, the main side—what they call manufacturing, to go to engineering. Employment guy says to me, "No way! You don't have to quit here. You don't have to," whatever, "quit and start like a new person." He said, "Oh no. You'd like to go to engineering?" And I said, "Yeah." Took out the request for a transfer, whatever—so that's what happened, maybe, oh, towards the end of '58, there, you know, when things was, kind of winding down now, you see. So I'm working in the die room—they put me on the shaper first—then they put me on a milling machine, and a boring mill. And I'm up there for, oh, about four months, you know, working overtime—oh, I loved it. [laughs] I'm a machinist, you know I mean, really.

DC: Yeah.

SS: Then they went ahead and said, "Well," you know, "you've been a machinist. You're a machinist. But you've got enough experience that you can go ahead and maybe a die maker on the floor. But in a union—the union was making a deal. There was more than one of us—that this was happening to more than one of us. "What we'll do is," they made an agreement that, we'd put you on a floor, "you'll be on the floor as a die maker *trainee*, to get that time difference between a toolmaker and a diemaker, OK. There's a certain, what they call hours, that when you, when you go in apprenticeship, that, you know, diemaker takes this and toolmaker . . .

DC: Sure right.

SS: And then we'll make you—you'll be a journeyman diemaker, see? "OK, sounds all right to me." So I'm on the floor, working on the die room, getting dirty as heck from some of the stuff from the die, and like that you know—you know, that's a dirty job. But I liked it, you know, hey.

DC: You liked it?

SS: I liked it. It was fine. It was pretty good. Well again, it was one of those things, the boss comes up to me, he says, "Uh, Strzelecki! Who do—who do you know?" You know, he had a German accent. I remember—Kris, somebody: "Who do you know in engineering?" "I don't know. Why?" He's got the transfers for me to go to engineering [laughs].

DC: Really.

SS: So the following week, I'm in engineering.

DC: So why did you have your sights set on engineering? What was it about engineering?

SS: Well, I, I think it's because of the versatility, maybe, of the work, and dealing more with—dealing with a lot of various things, and, in cars—in car parts, you know, you're dealing with, you know, it was like—the classification at that time was, uh, uh, metal-working machine operator. But actually, in essence what it was is metal modelmaker, OK? Because they changed that later on. They had to resolve that some years later—they—when they made us—they made us a metal modelmaker instead of metal-working machine operator, see?

DC: That was your job title, or whatever.

SS: Yeah right, because the union got rid of having, what they call—not, not, you know, apprentice—classifications. Metal model maker is an apprentice-able one, but metal-working machine operator is—was a classification, but not apprentice-able.

DC: OK.

SS: So that's what happened there. So I just didn't use it—you know, that type of work, I knew a few people that had already been there, been in there.

DC: So you had talked to some of them before?

SS: Huh?

DC: You had talked to some people who were already there?

SS: Yeah, right. And I felt that that was a type of place that I'd like to work.

DC: OK, yeah. Um, before then, you said that you really thought you were a machinist. What was it about being a machinist that appealed to you?

SS: Oh, probably, I like to make things, you see.

DC: It sounds like you liked that better than being a diemaker.

SS: Well diemaker wasn't—you know, I mean, that's the only thing. Except it's—but [mumbles] but when you're in engineering, you dealt—you made actual *parts*.

DC: OK.

SS: You know, prototype parts. You know, many, of, you know, many things, you know. So that was, that was, that was more appealing, you know.

DC: Yeah.

SS: And then, of course you get to—you got—you're near the car when you, you know—you see the stuff going on that's being built, you know—the first car that's put together, you know, like in there—everything is hand-built.

DC: Yeah, right, right. They're putting together the . . .

SS: See? Yeah right. You know, it's done—you see it all happening there, you know, in that particular, uh, setup, you know.

DC: How many people worked in that department with you?

SS: Oh man, well see, there was two shifts in machine shop—well I would say, oh, maybe—in just what they call the machine shop, maybe . . .

DC: Was that the engineering machine shop?

SS: Yeah, yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK.

SS: There's probably at least fifty people, at least, yeah. Most of them were on days, of course, you know, the bulk of them probably.

DC: Were you on days?

SS: I, I started out on, on nights, and I, uh—it was odd. I was staying on nights for a couple reasons, you know. It was—working on nights, probably I was there—there wasn't that many people, as much people, and you got to know the shop better, and everything, you know. You got more leeway. But day shift, you know, it was a little bit, you know—so the nights I stayed on because I wanted to get, more or less, get my feet wet in the whole, the whole thing that was happening.

DC: Get more experience.

SS: But I knew I could go on days. See, I knew that. But anyhow, we had a, we had a picnic—one of the guys that worked in the machine shop, he was having a picnic at his house, OK, inviting everybody to his house, you know. Went to his house for this picnic, and of course my wife's talking to one of the guys I know, and uh, and the guy had less seniority than me. He's working days. My wife found it out and says, and somehow comes up to me and says, "Oh, you could be working days too!" So, I had to put my transfer in for it. [laughs]

DC: Oh my.

SS: I had the three kids, so . . .

DC: Yeah, so, um, you, you had the three kids. Did your wife just stay home with the kids?

SS: Oh yes, yes.

DC: That was her job?

SS: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. Um, then , as your kids got a bit older, what kinds of things did you do as a family?

SS: When? At that time?

DC: Well as the kids got a bit older, you know.

SS: Oh, we would go on vacation. You know, once they got older, I mean, I was involved in Boy Scouts.

DC: Scouts, yeah, yeah.

SS: And we took, took vacations. You know, we camped, OK.

DC: Where would you go camping?

SS: Oh, oh any state parks in Michigan, up north. I remember we went at different times, you know, and—and they was all in Boy Scouts—I mean, when they were in Boy Scouts, later, they went—camping was every month.

DC: Right. I remember those days.

SS: Oh.

DC: What about any hunting or fishing or anything like that?

SS: Well, probably not as much, OK. I lost all my enthusiasm for hunting in the service. I had enough. I had enough bang bang.

DC: With guns?

SS: Yeah, the guns—I had, I, I, did hunting before I was in the service.

DC: Did you?

SS: Yeah, yeah. I did hunting.

DC: What kind of hunting did you do?

SS: Deer hunting. Deer hunting.

DC: Yeah.

SS: Pheasant hunting.

DC: Yeah.

SS: But I had enough of shooting.

DC: Do you think it was from being at the front lines?

SS: Huh?

DC: Do you think it was from being at the front lines?

SS: Well, something like that would, would, would, would get, get at you after awhile. It was—even when I got back to the evacuation hospital, we used to do—at different times we had to go someplace, we'd—on some particular areas where there was guerrillas, you know, we used to do some shoot 'em up, some mountains, before we, we went to the—I did a lot of shooting at the time. I had enough of shooting.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: And I just lost my enthusiasm. The fall, the fall—I went deer hunting in the fall of '54, and things changed in a few years—it was unreal.

DC: How so?

SS: Well, I went up to where—we always used to go to my uncle's property, and the next thing you know, we had—it wouldn't even be daylight, and people were shooting. Wait a minute! When I was in Korea, I knew where the enemy was at, but here, it was just people—oh, it was—it was—the last time I went hunting was '54.

DC: Yeah, I can see that would be unnerving.

SS: Huh?

DC: Guns firing from all over.

SS: Yeah—[hard to decipher] and it wasn't even daylight yet, you know I mean—had some few idiots out there, that were kind of trigger happy [laughs].

DC: Man. Um, you were in the engineering department, then, for quite some time, it sounds like.

SS: OK, I got there, let's say, around April or May of '59, and, OK, went there and all of a sudden, in '61 . . .

DC: Oh, OK, something happened.

SS: In '61, had a reduction of work force in engineering.

DC: OK, uh huh.

SS: And it just happened to be—it was ten people got bumped—I mean, got laid off. I was the tenth one. Where did they put me? Die room again.

DC: Oh, OK.

SS: Because I had previous, uh, you know, seniority there.

DC: Right.

SS: So I'm back in the die room. OK?

DC: How was that?

SS: Oh, I'm back there—hey! It's work isn't it? [laughs]

DC: Yeah, it is. Is that how you approached it, thought? Were you grateful to have work, or were you upset that you had left engineering? Or how did you handle it?

SS: Well, I knew that—well, I kind of had it in the back of my mind that I could, you know—if they're going to hire back in engineering, I'd be the first one, because I was the last one to get laid off.

DC: Right, right, right.

SS: OK? So I went there, and I was back in the die room—and of course I already knew some people there, and I'm, "What am I doing?" You know, "What are you doing back here?" OK. So one of my bosses there that I knew quite a bit, you know that I knew in there. Uh, I was probably there not over, oh, a month, and one day one of the, one of the bosses came up to me, says, "Take off your apron here," he says, "I want . . . " "Oh, OK." We went to the superintendent's office, OK? In the superintendent's office, the superintendent said, blah, blah. What's happening here, you know. You know, I mean, I'm in front of all the, all the, all the bigwigs at Plant 14 there.

DC: What was up?

SS: So he says, "You're wondering why we called you in here huh?" I says, "Well, yeah." "Well," he says, "what we want," he says, "well we thought you might be interested in die design."

DC: Um.

SS: Sol one of the, one of the, the supervisors in die design, Bob Haskins—I had him for die design in trade—I mean when I was going to night school, see? So he kind of—he says, "Well, I kind of thought that maybe you, you would like to do that." And he says, "I can remember you in die design," he says, "I thought you did quite well on your drawings, and your specs, you know. I remember you, and," he says, "I thought maybe you'd like to have die design." Ooh, you know, this is—Says, "I don't know," I says. I was just plain unaware of what I, what I really thought I might like, you know. I said, "Well, that's quite a change going from a machinist to white-collar guy on a table in designing."

DC: Would die designing be a union job, or would that be . . .

SS: No, that was, that wasn't a union job. That was a salary job.

DC: A salary job, yeah, yeah.

SS: And I went ahead and I says—and he says I have to make up my mind, like, uh, *now*.

DC: Oh really.

SS: Don't give me two days, a week, nothing. He says—"Now!" I said—well, I put it off—OK, and I says, "I don't know," I said. "Sure, I had drawing in school," and OK, but I said, "as to go ahead and getting on a board for," you know, "making a living out of it," I said, "I don't know if I could hack it." If I would really like it, you know? I said, I just told him, "If I don't like it," I said, "I want—I'm gonna move out. I mean I want to get out of it, OK?" And they, they took me on that—and next thing I know, I'm in the employment office, and I'm a die designer [laughs].

DC: Really? OK. All right. How was that? How did you like it?

SS: Well, OK, I, you know, could get your feet wet without doing, you know, whatever. And I—they at first, you know—different. It's not bad. But then—I had about three months or so, and I—oh, and the next thing you know—it was all during the summertime, you know—and we're in air conditioning, nice, whatever—and at different times, we had to go out on the floor, maybe to check a press, or some seal—you're making a die, doing some changes on a die, or something, and you had to go out in the hundred degree shop. And you come back in—and during the summer I—[stutters] it's [?] I'd get home, and my wife says,"Hey, what's wrong with you?" I said, "I'm just plain tired," you know. You know, and well, you know, and it was that way—you know, and then, hey, the summer went by and still I didn't—I wasn't *happy* with it, you know. It was just—it wasn't part of me to be on a board, you know, all day long. You take a break or something—but all day long like that, and Saturday, or maybe some overtime during the week, you know. You put in extra time, you know, right?

DC: Did you get paid for that? Or were you on salary?

SS: It was on salary—you get paid for that. You know, you get paid for overtime like that, you know. But anyhow, it was—and finally it just started wearing on me, and towards the—getting in the fall time, and I said—I was getting more and more, what they call, uh,

uh, *not happy*. And then—besides that then what happened, the Bob Haskins who hired me, whatever, he moved on, OK, and another person was going to take over. Well this other person that was going to take over, I had him one time in one of my math classes, or something doing when I was going to night school—and there was, there was—bad rapport between my feelings toward him, OK? And I said, "Oh, he's going to be my boss in here now," and whatever. A couple guys that I was working there with—you would have some people that would help you out a lot, you know. When I was in machines, and, you know, work like that you had people help you. You get—in this situation, there was some guys in there that just wouldn't clue you in on something, that went on in the department, or what to do, you know, some little, you know—what do they call?—a little hint on something to do, you know, that makes your job easier, something. But then, you know, there's just, different, different group, OK. Not everybody was like that, but just a few that you had to deal with, you know. And so I put this hand up, I says, "Uh uh. I think I'm going to bail out." So I went to the superintendent that hired me and I says, "Hey . . . " "Oh, you don't want to do that." "Ah," I says, I says, "I just . . . " Stick around for awhile," he says, "we're going to have openings. You can get out. If you don't like—really this isn't," you know, like, he said, "we're going to have some openings for supervisors in a new frame plant that we're starting up." He says, "That's going to happen in a couple months, before spring," he says, "and we can fit you in there," you know. Supervisor. I says, "Well, no, no, I don't feel that—I just—I'll wait," I said, "I'll wait and go to the—whenever engineering will hire me back." He said, "Oh, just a minute." He gets on the phone. He calls my old superintendent in engineering, and said, "Well we got Steve Strzelecki here, that," you know, "came from your department. Is anything happening about an opening?" Well, said, "Not right now," you know, whatever, so, anyhow. Rest of the while, he told me, says, "There's nothing happening," he says. "Well, I just feel that I want to," you know, "move on." I said, I said, "If I have to," I says, "I'll go back to," I said, "I've got seniority. I can go back to Plant 8." He said, "You wouldn't do that, would you?" I said, "For a temporary thing, I'll go back there." He said, "I'll tell you," he said, "just hang on," he says, "for—stay with it, for – until—I'll get with Archie again, and I'll get with the employment office, and you know, we'll see what we can do." A couple days later, he got with it and one guy that was on sick leave out of engineering machine shop there, they forced him to retire.

DC: OK—you got your job back.

SS: And I got back, back to engineering.

DC: What did your, what did your co-workers in engineering think about your, uh, little, you know [?] as a die designer?

SS: Oh, oh, oh, oh, they was—I had all kinds of controversy about that.

DC: Tell me about that.

SS: Oh [laughs]. Well there's always a thing about, uh—a die maker can be a toolmaker, but a toolmaker can't be a die maker—OK, or something. So when I—you know, there's always a little bit of that, whatever. And of course, of course, of course when I got into

die design, you know, I didn't tell nobody. I didn't tell any—[mumbles]—and when I went into die design that first morning, everybody looked, and there was about three or four guys in there that were die makers that got into die design. They didn't know how—"How in the heck," you know, "did you," like, "get in here?" "Well," I said, "just"—then I says, you know, "like, you know, any toolmaker can be a die maker, die designer," I says, you know. [laughs]

DC: [laughs along]

SS: Well there was a little, whatever—but that was a kind of a thing that was going on, and of course you had guys that was, that was at engineering that would have—whatever—about getting into die design. They, they, they—I was—it was—they was very *envious* of me.

DC: OK.

SS: *Very envious* of me getting into die design. [Stutters] It was—there was—I was able to do that type of work, you know. So when I got back there, I told two guys distinctly, I said, "Hey, I think you'd like it." But anyway, they got—they went there.

DC: They did?

SS: They did. They finally put their application—they went ahead and got into the die design.

DC: Interesting. Wow.

SS: They went in there, and says—I just—certain—you gotta have, be a certain some type of a guy that would want to do that. Be on a board, and spend that, you know, that type of time. Sometimes you get a headache. You got, you got table like this, and you got big car prints, and you—you can't sit on a stool. You can't lean on—you're doing all this thing, you know. By the end of the day, you're, you're kind of—you try to walk out a little bit—you know, it's just, you gotta, you gotta blend into being somewhat sedatory [looking for the word sedentary] type of guy, you know, that needs—you know, like, you got some people can maybe sit at a desk, they can work on a computer all day long. I could never do that.

DC: So you liked to move around.

SS: I—the more I can get physical, hands on something, instead of just sitting there. I couldn't, I couldn't do an office job. [laughs]

DC: Yeah. That's a good point.

SS: Yeah. Everybody's like—I think in our society, that I think more people ought to find, or know what they *like* in life, you know, OK, instead of—not doing something that's against your nature maybe.

DC: Did anybody give you a hard time for taking a salary job for awhile?

SS: Umm, not, not, no.

DC: No?

SS: All I had is people said, "Well how come you'd want to ever quit?" You know? I mean you know. You got this type of thing.

DC: Did the salary job offer a significant amount of money? More?

SS: No. Just at the time I got, I got the same as what I would be making as a diemaker.

DC: OK, so there wasn't any great increase in salary.

SS: There wasn't—no, no—there was no difference in, then, what they call the pay.

DC: Well that's pretty interesting that, uh, you know, the skilled trade job and the salary job were about the same.

SS: Yeah, you know, that entered in.

DC: What about benefits?

SS: Huh? See, you know, you know, at the time—I didn't—it was—I don't know if they—yeah, they had the stock program—that I never got—wasn't in there long enough. You had to be in, a year, I think that was a requirement. You gotta be on salary a year before you could have—and I wasn't [mumbles] . . .

DC: OK. You didn't qualify . . .

SS: Yeah, I didn't qualify for the stock program there—that type of benefit.

DC: So did you end up in the engineering room for good at that point?

SS: Then from that point, thirty years later I retired from there. [laughs]

DC: I guess you hit your stride at that point, OK.

SS: Yeah, thirty years later I retired from there.

DC: [laughs] Zip! Well, I'm sure there's more to talk about in those thirty years, but that's a pretty interesting journey up through that point in time. You were definitely all over the *world*, let alone all over the plant here at Pontiac Motors.

SS: Yeah, I floated around quite a bit there. Yeah, especially that year, that one—that '58, the year '58 there. Oh, that was—that—I mean that was, that was a, that was a—in fact, in fact—well, let me see—what happened that one time?—I don't know. I wasn't laid off. Wasn't laid off for nothing, because I, I went ahead and did—I worked full-time, but

if remember, I didn't—I was supposed to go ahead—and as a journeyman I was supposed to go ahead and make more money, whatever. End of that year, when I looked at my, whatever, I wasn't, I wasn't making any more money in '58 than I did in '57.

DC: Well you worked a couple days a week in assembly, you said.

SS: Yeah, yeah, right. So they used to do that.

DC: You were paid assembly rate for that, I assume.

SS: And then, and then they'd go ahead and they'd, they would put me on the gun job as inspection too, you know, because they needed—but what they—I knew what was happening, because they would—so that's why I went in, put in that application for engineering. They was inspecting all the tools, fixtures, and stuff to package it away for storage because the gun—so I was working there for awhile too, you know.

DC: OK, so they were starting to wind that up.

SS: Yeah, so—it was kind of a, you know, back and forth—my tool box went from Plant 9 to Plant 15 to [laughs] . . .

DC: So you liked to move around, but maybe not that much?

SS: No, no, no. It wasn't in, you know—and that inspection wasn't, that wasn't my bag either. Just like, just like in die design. It wasn't my bag. Inspection.

DC: You might have already mentioned this, but why was that not up your alley? What did you not like about inspection?

SS: It doesn't seem like a—it was—wasn't—you didn't—you inspected something. What did you do? You inspected it. If I *made* it, I know—here it is. I made this. This is it. But to come out just to inspect it, make out a report . . .

DC: Too close to a desk job?

SS: Uh no, right. Sometimes it would be more *paper*work, really, than actual inspection. Especially on the gun job. Oh, for the government, you had [chuckles] everything for the government.

DC: All kinds of paperwork, yeah.

SS: Paperwork, yeah.

DC: Oh man. Um, what did you think about, um, how the union dealt with skilled tradesmen, and skilled workers?

SS: Well I—there was a—the one problem that I—you know, I was in, I got involved on, is when, when, when—in mid'60s, about '66 I think it was, we started bringing in numerical control machines, see, in our department. In engineering. And, OK, they had

to be programmed, and you know, they were, they were more high-tech. But then what the company started doing is, is uh, having people program the jobs that went on the machine. So all you did is press a button, put the tape in, you know, and run these parts. So I was a little bit annoyed at that. And I said, "Now look, that's taking some skill away from me." So technology is coming along, you know—you go with technology. And that's what I felt, OK. Tell me about it. And then, of course, there's some guys that, you know, whatever, oh you know, they didn't think about it that way. So I got a, I got a committeeman, and wrote out a grievance, and filed a grievance, wrote out why I felt this way. And they tried to get a group grievance on it, but the guys even said that they wouldn't, they didn't want to be that type—the area I was working in was the first machine to come out. And it was me involved, and the guys that I worked with—a few of them. But nobody would—so the union set up, got this grievance. They tried to get a good grievance, that would have been better. But nothing happened, so I turned in the grievance. So this went on, I don't know, about '66 until about seventy, in '72 or so before—it had to go through a couple contracts with a, a, the higher-level grievance, you know. Not just, whatever. And finally they started letting us—say, OK, you get that program on data, after we just won that contract, I think it was about seventy, I don't know, '72, '73, somewhere like that. Come up, the boss says, "OK, go in the programming room there. And they're gonna show you some things about the program," and blah, blah, you know.

DC: So is that what you really wanted? Some . . .

SS: Well, just advancing your, as part of new technology, you go—and don't take it away from me, you know. Make me more or less a push button type of guy, and feed it, and you know, that's, that's lower skill, OK? Previous to doing this, I mean as a toolmaker—I mean I was in there, you made your, built your fixture you needed, you did all the figuring of—running a regular, manual machine, you did—you had to move it some, you know, out of the different area, you had to move it. You know, you had to move it to do—to machine your part, you—that was your job. But when you got a computer controlled, or numerical controlled—you know they called it that—it's just, it takes it away, and it gets you—somebody setting it up for you. So finally they did it, and they started to get more and more machines in, that was like this, and then they started training more people, training people to do it. And the guys that the—of course the guys that never—you know—I had a few guys that got in on the ground floor, maybe they—and then they become—they got on salary to program—I mean to give us, what they call—not programming, but they'd get in, what they call the computer room. But we could, we could still—we ended up you could still program your own work, your own jobs. I understand in areas now that they've even—they don't—it's back to square one where people are programming and building fixtures and [coughs] just got skilled people feeding it and running machines. It's—right there in the same building where I used to work there, uh, it's now the power train. It's only guys in there that are working that I worked with—well, there you go—if somebody isn't out there beating on, on the door there, and getting them, getting to do something, it was [?].

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: So I got out just in time, I guess [laughs]. I got out, and I guess all the young guys are going to have to live with what they, what they're letting allow, being, you know, allowed to, company being allowed to do that, you know. Have them come in, the fixtures are being built by somebody, and they're putting the fixtures on the machine, they set the program up, and somebody—have somebody setting up all the tools, drills, mills, all the tooling—they're setting it all up for—you know? All they have to do is feed in a part. To me, that was wrong.

DC: Do you think it makes a better product?

SS: What?

DC: Do you think it makes a better product?

SS: Not a better product, no. No, I don't think so, because if you put the person that's going to go ahead—and if you put the skilled tradesperson, programming that job, and he's involved in it from level one, like he used to be, without the new technology—in other words, when you run that first part, he knew it was right or wrong. Every part I ever run, I knew it was right—I knew it was right. I didn't go ahead and run a dozen or something. I didn't run a dozen bad parts—I'd do it right—the first one was right. I checked it myself. I know how to be a machinist—I check my work. And at one time I had a thing with inspectors in engineering—I says—somebody would say, uh, "Is it all right Steve?" I says, "Is perfect good enough?" "Perfect good enough?" That's it. So that's the way it was. I mean, I felt that—and it wasn't just me. It's just—other guys. I know many of the guys—Paul Ish, for example, you interviewed—that any work—no, no you don't check Paul's work. It's right. If the blueprint says it's such and such, it's right. It's not plus or minus something. It's right there! You know, anything that I know that he did—and I used to have him do work for me in the area that I had—had him make me some gauges and [?] you know. I don't check it. It's right. You know he's just one of them. There's different guys that I knew that when you're working in this field, and you like your job, you ain't going to turn out scrap. You know? And Paul, Paul was like that too. I mean, he just—nobody checked his work. If you, if you was to check his work, it would be almost like a real, huh, [laughs]—you don't do that with a person who's got some pride in his work, OK.

DC: I take it you knew who was who as far as that went.

SS: [softly] Yeah, right. You know, Paul had a lot of pride in his work too. I mean anything he did, I mean. [chuckles]

DC: Are there any questions that you thought I was going to be asking you that I didn't ask you?

SS: Oh I don't know. I'd say, oh, probably a couple of questions about the family. I didn't think that you would get, like in family, but you know. Our family was always a General Motors family.

DC: Uh huh.

SS: OK? Brothers, sisters, Dad, sons.

DC: You all worked in various plants?

SS: Well, I had my brother next to me, he worked—he retired from Pontiac Motor. He was on salary for half the time, you know. He was on hourly, and then he become a supervisor. And then, I had two sisters that worked, uh, Truck and Bus. They retired from there.

DC: Did they? Are they still around the area?

SS: Oh yeah. We're all in the old area. Our whole family, like, is in the area. In Oakland County, OK. And then my youngest brother, he's still a mechanic at the Tech Center. He was working at—in Pontiac here. He came in later, in this time, whatever. He was working at a dealership, you know, over here. And then he hired in at Pontiac Engineering. Then when we closed up there, he had—he transferred to the Tech Center, which he's still there. So he's probably on his way to—he's got over thirty years now, so he can retire. So, so—like I say, we're a General Motors family.

DC: I guess so. Yeah.

SS: All my three sons has worked at General Motors, for Pontiac.

DC: Yeah? What did they end up doing?

SS: Uh, they was—after they got kicked around and they ended up at, at the Fiero plant—and then—two of them was at the Fiero plant. And when they cut that out, they just was off on, what they call unemployment. And when that ran out, you know, whatever—then meanwhile, they got, they have to work. I mean, they wanted to do something else, OK, so they got other, other careers.

DC: What did they do?

SS: So I got—one of the twins is a builder. He got into carpentry, and then he become a builder. And the one is a plumber, the one. And then my youngest son, he was a plumber also. He's a master plumber. And then he bought a business. He got a car wash. He raises cows, and whatever. So he—they all got a different—you know they all had over ten years at, at, at GM. They started out—one started in Plant 8, and the other two worked in Plant 9, and then when that—when they cut back there, they went to the Fiero. And they thought they was going to have—stayed there for awhile. And Fiero—they dropped that, you know. Then they had chances to be relocated, like to New York, or something like that. Maybe in Ohio. They didn't want to do that, so they hung around. They worked at other jobs, you know, still collecting their SUB pay, or some layoff pay until—so finally they took a buyout. Then, they had worked for—but, you know, quite a few—you know, over the years, at something else, and . . .

DC: It sounds like things have worked out well for them.

SS: So they've done—[stutters]—a lot better right now, I'm pretty sure of it. You know they—I'll be happier, you know, if they got into—you know, they like the work that they do. I mean, you know, they've done, you know, financially they've done quite well.

DC: Yeah, yeah. That sounds good. I really appreciate you spending some time with me. I'm going to have to—I really appreciate you coming in to spend time, and letting me talk with you, after many efforts we finally made it work. [laughs]

SS: [laughs] It's just like—I had to go to a funeral yesterday. It was just like old reunion days of Pontiac Motor people. This guy that, who died, he was, well, one of the guys I went to trade school with, and worked in our engineering, and he was—there was a lot of friends in the area, you know. And so, you know, a lot of guys that showed up—went last night to the funeral home. I was shocked to see so many of them [laughs]. Oh my goodness, it must have been a couple dozen. And you know there was just lots of guys . . .

DC: Were there some that you worked with all the way through?

End of Interview