Bud Weber Interview
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Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
Transcribed by Marie O'Brien
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DC: . . . [setting up the microphone] because you're more important.

BW: Can you tell when it's—when you can hear it good?

DC: Yeah, there's a little monitor here. On this side you can see. It can pick up your voice.

BW: Oh, yeah.

DC: So as long as that thing's moving, we're in pretty good shape. I can actually even adjust the recording levels a bit. Anyways, I start out with really basic questions, and the most basic one is where were you born?

BW: I was born in Kingsley, Michigan.

DC: That's, what, way up by Traverse City? Up that way?

BW: It's about thirteen miles this side of Traverse City.

DC: OK. And how long had your parents been in Kingsley?

BW: All their lives. That was their complete life. They were born and raised around Kingsley.

DC: They were, OK.

BW: Farmers. They were farmers.

DC: OK. Well, tell me about the farm up there in Kingsley.

BW: Well, we raised a lot of grain and one of the main crops for money crops was potatoes. We used to raise from twenty-five to fifty acres of potatoes. And my Dad dealt in potatoes. I mean, he bought and shipped potatoes to different parts of the state—to Grand Rapids, and Greenville, Michigan, and places like that when we grew up. But we used to—my brother and I and the younger brothers—we used to do the grading for them, to make for number one. Number one grade potatoes.

DC: Was that mainly by size of the potatoes?

BW: Yeah. We had a sizing machine. It was called a grader, and that was run by hand. We

didn't have any electric, much electric—people didn't have much electric back then. And you wouldn't just go along and plug your motor in on the grader. And we loaded—all the railroad cars that we shipped in held six hundred bushels.

DC: In a single railroad car, six hundred bushels?

BW: Sure. Put a lot of them in the railroad. And we'd sell a lot of them by truck. And we raised—my Dad raised radishes, radish seed. We had a lot of grain. We had—we had two farms. We farmed two big farms.

DC: Did you own the property?

BW: We owned the property at one, and one was a property that my Dad lost—it was a hundred and twenty acre farm—during the Depression. He couldn't make the payments because he didn't have no money. In fact, one year we hauled the whole year's crop of potatoes, we hauled them out in the field the next spring, because there was no market for them.

DC: Couldn't sell them.

BW: Well, people couldn't buy because they didn't have any money. The people in the city, they were on welfare and they were barely getting by. They were knocking coal off the coal cars to keep the heat in their house and stuff like that. That was—back then—I realized—I was old enough to realize it was really tough times. See, I'm eighty-five years old and I spent a lot of time—well, I spent a lot of time on the farm until I was twenty-one or twenty-two years old.

DC: OK. So you were really on the farm all the way through the Depression.

BW: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: So were you born in, what, 1918, 1917?

BW: 1917.

DC: 1917, OK. Wow.

BW: And I was the second oldest of eleven children.

DC: Eleven children, wow.

BW: Yeah. And we're all living but one.

DC: Is that right? That's amazing.

BW: My younger brother—a younger brother than I, he had Parkinson's disease. He died about ten years ago.

DC: That's astonishing. You've got some strong genes in your family.

BW: Yeah, well there's five of us in the eighty years old—that's top end. Eighty and more.

DC: So you were the second oldest.

BW: Mm hm.

DC: And you said that your parents . . .

BW: Nine boys and two girls.

DC: OK, nine boys, two girls. And you said that your parents had lived there their entire lives, as well?

BW: Yeah, they lived right in that area and my Dad was seventy-seven when he died and my Mother was eighty-eight when she died.

DC: So when did the—who was the first generation to move to the Kingsley area? Do you know?

BW: Um, gosh, I don't know. You mean in . . .

DC: In your family background. Yeah, was it your grandparents?

BW: Background. Yeah, my parents—well, my grandparents lived in Bear Lake before they moved to Michigan, I mean, before they moved up near Traverse City.

DC: OK. And where's Bear Lake?

BW: That's out near Manistee. You know where Manistee is?

DC: Yes. Uh hum.

BW: Yeah. Not Manistique, Manistee.

DC: Manistique. Manistique's in the UP [Upper Peninsula]. Right.

BW: I got a brother lives in Manistique.

DC: OK.

BW: They lived in—they lived in Bear Lake. And then when—my [short pause] Dad's folks, I guess, came from around Grand Rapids. Yeah. They moved up there and started a—they homesteaded. See, they lived there when the thing was—the farm was nothing but mostly

trees. And they cut the trees down and they used the lumber to build the barn and stuff like that. And then—it was something my Dad said—some of it was so thick of trees, they just fell the trees in big windrows and set them afire. They burnt that wood up. [chuckles]

DC: That was a lot of work.

BW: Oh yeah. You bet it was. But we worked hard. Those people worked hard. You know, they—a lot of hand work was done. What they couldn't do by hand, they used the horses. And way back when, before my time, they used oxen.

DC: How old were you when you first started helping out around the farm?

BW: Well I, out of—see, the four—four of us were all boys, and my mother needed help in the house. So I took and helped her in the house, mostly. And the other three helped out on the farm.

DC: What sorts of things did you do around the house to help out?

BW: Oh yeah, well, I'd a done the dishes and helped prepare the meals, like peeling potatoes, stuff like that, you know? Because it took a lot of food for eleven children and two parents. That's a big bunch to feed. And then do the laundry. My Mother worked hard. She worked—well, they both worked hard. That's all there was to it. Even in the Depression, I can remember we got one thing for Christmas and that was a lucky thing to have. One toy.

DC: Uh hum. Well how did you do the laundry when you were very young—when you were young?

BW: Oh, my Mother did—she did most of it. I don't know how she did it.

DC: Did she have a washing machine? They came in the '20s. Or just a wash tub?

BW: No, well—they did, later years, she did have one of those gas-operated ones. It made a lot of smoke when it ran. And before that, I know I seen her wring out those big overalls and we wore long johns then, on the farm. And then on a day when it was nice, they'd hang them out on the trees. The clothes came in frozen, lots of ice. [laughs] It was a great life, but a tough life. Tough life.

DC: So did you have a vegetable garden, as well, for your own use and all that?

BW: When I was a kid?

DC: Yeah. I meant did you grow your own food?

BW: We grew our own food—a lot of it. See, we had our own pigs. We'd usually kill five hogs in the spring and five in the fall, and put them in brine solution to keep that meat all year around, see? And we—the only thing we—once in awhile, my Dad would go out and buy

flour. And then we would—my Mother would bake, sometimes twice a week, seven and eight loaves of bread. And sometimes we took the grain from that wheat, took it to the grist mill and had it ground. But the bread looked kind of grayish color like that. Because it wasn't bleached, see. That's the way it was ground. And that's the way we lived. We had—my Mother used to improvise a lot. And my Dad used to buy—some of the bread companies would have a sale on bread: two cents a loaf. So my Dad would buy a whole big box of it. We thought we were getting a big, a big present! And ring bologna. We used to really like—we always had beef and pork. We had plenty of that.

DC: So you had cattle as well?

BW: Oh, my Dad ran—yeah, we had twelve or fifteen milk cows. And then raised our own beef, you know, from the cattle. And our own hogs. We had our own chickens. We used to have a chicken dinner a couple times a month or so. Took two chickens to feed us! [laughs]

DC: Imagine maybe even more than that, yeah.

BW: [laughs]

DC: So did you gather eggs, as well?

BW: Oh yeah. We had—we'd have them there—and we had a—some of the milk, when we took the milk to the—or the cream—we had a separator, and we'd separate the milk and the cream, and then we'd keep it cool till we had it so much ahead. Then we'd take it to the grocery store, this country grocery store, and they had a machine there would check the—the fat container [content] and they'd make this into butter. And then they'd sell it, and they'd pay the farmer so much for the rich cream. They'd pay—whatever they did, that went on to the groceries. We didn't have enough money to even buy a lot of things, you know, so the grocer, he kept a little tab with the name "Weber" on the end of it. And every time we bought something and couldn't pay for it, he'd put that in that book. And in the fall, we sold enough of the potato crop to pay that off.

DC: OK. So you'd run a tab through the year.

BW: Yeah. We had to.

DC: Sure.

BW: The cows didn't produce. It was cheap. It's very cheap. And we've had a lot of—my Mother, we lived on a main highway into Traverse City. And in the summertime, around cherry—cherry harvest time, the hitchhikers would come from down this way and go up there and they'd pick cherries for, through the summer, till the crop, the cherry season lasted. And they paid them a dollar, or they paid them ten cents a lug. And you gotta pick fast to make a dollar and a half, because them lugs are big [laughs]. Yeah, they were big. To make, to make fifteen cents, you know? Or ten cents. Yup. [A "lug" was twenty-five

pounds, or between eight and twelve quarts.]

DC: So did they ever stop by . . .

BW: We fed a lot of those guys, yeah. They were—oh, sometimes five and six guys in a gang. And they'd—my Dad would tell them, "You can sleep in the barn." Wouldn't let them in the house. And they—"You can sleep in the barn. *But*, any you guys got anything, cigarettes or anything to smoke, you give them to me and I'll give them back to you in the morning." Because he didn't want to catch the barn on fire. And then my Mother—probably in the evening, we just got through doing the, separating the milk, and my Mother would take and cut some of that fresh bread up, and put cream and sugar on it. We didn't have any butter or anything. And you know, those guys thought that was out of this world. Sometimes it'd take a couple loaves of bread to feed them. [laughs] But we did.

DC: They were pretty grateful for it.

BW: Oh yeah. Yeah. They were. Next morning they'd get up and head for Traverse City to the cherry farms. But to find the cherry farms—they were on their way to Traverse City. There was a lot of them on this side of Traverse City. And there was a lot of them up around the peninsula and up in there. Them farmers all raised cherries. That was a great life.

DC: So did you go to school then?

BW: Yeah, we went to St. Mary's.

DC: OK. Is that a Catholic school?

BW: Yep. It was a Catholic community. The whole thing was mostly Catholic.

DC: All right. All around Kingsley?

BW: Yeah. Well, around Kingsley it was mixed, the religions and all. But around Hannah—that was the name of the little town where we lived outside of Kingsley.

DC: Hannah?

BW: And wasn't much. It was a store, a grocery store, and a car—a tractor dealership. International dealership. Yeah. That's it.

DC: And was the school—or how far away from your farm was the school?

BW: About—for us, it was a mile and three quarters. We had to walk that every day. Some of them had to walk two miles, some had to walk three miles. And the days, bad days, the parents took them to, took them to school, you know. They had an old Model T, you know.

DC: It'd be a long walk in the winter up there.

BW: Oh, we used skis. Went to school on skis. And we did walk, too. A lot of times my Dad would take us with the horses. Snow would be about, sometimes three foot deep.

DC: How many students were in your school?

BW: Oh, total, probably ninety or a hundred.

DC: OK. That's quite a bit.

BW: Yeah. It was a two-story school. You have all age ranges there. Yeah.

DC: And then . . .

BW: Had nuns that done the teaching.

DC: OK. So what about high school then?

BW: There was no high school.

DC: There was no high school, OK. Eighth grade was it.

BW: That's why I only got—that's why they built a high school after I left. The younger generation got to go. From, oh, us four—four of us older boys didn't get to go to school, or college, or, to high school.

DC: To high school, right.

BW: Yeah.

DC: OK, so at eighth grade you . . .

BW: But I have a sister that's a nun. And the other sister, she was a nurse there at Traverse City Munson-Decker Hospital. And the rest of the boys, they—they went to school. They went to high school. One of them retired from running a filling station, a gas station. And the other one, Jay, he's still farming and Clarence, he's retired. Sold his farm and had an oil well on it. And I guess he gets a little something off of that. And my brother Jay, he's got a couple of oil wells. And he's a cattle dealer. Yeah. He does—he farms—he used to farm three hundred acres, but he's kind of slowed down because he's seventy-two years old.

DC: That's reason to slow down. Are they still up in that part of the state?

BW: Yup.

DC: OK. Are any of them on the same property that you grew up on?

BW: Is it still there?

DC: Yeah.

BW: Yeah, but they sold it. My brother, brother that's the big farmer, he bought the home place. The brothers bid on it, and he was the highest bidder, so he got it. Yeah.

DC: So tell me more about what it was like—well can you remember any differences, say, between the 1920s and the Great Depression, you know, growing up on the farm there. You started to talk about the Depression, but . . .

BW: Oh, yeah, it gradually picked up after the World War II.

DC: Let's stay before the war right now. Tell me more about what it was like there during the Depression.

BW: Oh. God. People was—well, what I can remember, on Saturday afternoon, most—a lot of them farmers, would go to Traverse City and do their shopping. About whatever the money they had to do it with. And [short pause] a lot of things happened . . .

DC: You mentioned that your family had to, or lost part of the property . . .

BW: They lost a hundred and twenty acres of the farm.

DC: Hundred twenty acres. Yeah.

BW: Yeah. They couldn't make the payments on it. So that was when Hoover was in office. A hundred and twenty acre farm with forty acres of timber on it. They lost it because he had put—my Dad planted five hundred cherry trees and it had a bad frost one year, and heaved them cherry trees all out of the ground, and they died. So he lost that all. They didn't have any kind of insurance back then. And what little insurance they had, they had on the buildings. And I can remember tornadoes going—they called them cyclones back then. They were tornadoes, really. Tearing up places like—wasn't as prominent as they are today. I don't know whether something's happened to our, our atmospheric conditions since the last few years. From, I think from a lot of this airplane pollution, and other different kinds of pollution from diesel engines and stuff.

DC: You remember more tornadoes, more dramatic . . .

BW: I remember some cyclones—they called them cyclones.

DC: Cyclones. That's right, cyclones.

BW: Back then. Now they call them tornadoes.

DC: You mentioned that you went to the church school. Was the church a big part of your family's life?

BW: Quite a bit. Yeah.

DC: Uh-huh. So what sorts of things did you do with the church?

BW: Oh, we had—every year we had a Sunday dinner, they put up, you know. And sometimes—now they're making—they're still having these old-time Sunday dinners, chicken dinners they called them. At St. Mary's. And they—they come up sometimes with thirty thousand dollars, forty thousand dollars, with all the concessions and everything they have on the weekend, you know. And they're doing pretty good. They raffle off cars. Of course the tickets—sometimes the tickets cost twenty-five bucks. [laughs] Now. Didn't used to. Used to, they didn't—well, they used to raffle off blankets and quilts and stuff like that years ago, because when I was a kid, these elderly women in the parish would all get together once a week and do quilting. They had a quilting party. And once a week or once a month. And we'd gather together in someone—one or the other's home, and make quilts and donate them to the church, to raffle off.

DC: Did you ever get together with kids from other farms?

BW: Oh yeah, we had—see, there where we lived, there was several farms around there—they had [pauses] from seven, eight, to twelve kids in a family. Used to—on Sundays, we used to get together a lot. Get into a lot of deviltry. [laughs]

DC: What kinds of deviltry did you get into?

BW: Oh, used to take the horses out, the big old farm horses, and ride them, ride them bareback. We didn't have any saddles. Didn't have a saddle. And we used to—some of us that owned little old rattletraps of cars—we couldn't afford anything better. We'd go out and fly around the farm and race them, race around the farms. [laughs]

DC: I take it that was when you were a little bit older.

BW: Oh yeah, that was when I was about sixteen, seventeen years old. Yeah. That's about all.

DC: Did the families—did the farmers ever help each other out, as well, with the work?

BW: Always. Always. Threshing. Thrashing and filling silos. That was another big—two big things that they would go from one farmer to the other and all of them would help each other out, you know.

DC: What do you remember about those events?

BW: Well, I remember a lot. The old German cooks, they put out some good feed. Good meals.

[laughs] I always liked that I could go to the different ones. And then we used to get the—when we was younger, we used to get jobs. And if we got our potato harvest done before somebody else and they needed help, we used to go help them. And they paid us maybe a dollar a day. Yeah.

DC: OK. How did you harvest the potatoes back then?

BW: With a digger. Or once—earlier in times, we used to use a fork. Just dig them out and shake them out off the vine. But then they come out with a potato digger, a machine that went under the potatoes, and then it went up a kind of a chain link—not chain link, but it was long links about that long, and they were about that far apart. And they were going over oblong wheels to shake the dirt off, and out the back end . . .

DC: Came the potatoes.

BW: Yeah, the potatoes and the vines and the whole works. We had to pick them potatoes out of them vines. Or pick them off the ground.

DC: So did that seem like a big improvement to you, to have a potato digger?

BW: Only improvement, only—it was a big improvement as far as harvesting. But we got the guys—I mean, we always got backaches. My Dad said, "No, you don't have no back yet because you ain't old enough." [laughs]

DC: Was that from having to reach in and dig all the stuff out?

BW: Well, you pick them up and put them in buckets. Or crates.

DC: How much would the potato harvester do at a time? I mean, how much could it . . .

BW: Oh, one row at a time.

DC: One row at a time.

BW: Every other row we had to take, because you couldn't go right down the same—next to the row that one wheel would always be on the—going down the row, see, and ruin the potatoes. So we had to go back and forth, every other row.

DC: Could you go back then and do those every other rows?

BW: Oh yeah, turn around and do the same thing. But they did it all with horses. Then when we had—Uncle Sam come along and said he needed some boys in the Army to fight the Germans, my Dad didn't have anybody left. They took all four of us. Oh, no they didn't take my older brother. But they took three of us. And at one time there was four of us in the service. And he couldn't farm alone, and do that farming alone with the team, so we bought a tractor. So he could move faster and work longer hours.

DC: So you got replaced by a tractor.

BW: [laughs] Oh, I was gone then already. I was down here.

DC: Yeah.

BW: Yeah.

DC: Well . . .

BW: I got discharged—I mean, I got—wait a minute—I got drawn into the Army from here, down here.

DC: Oh, so you were here before you went in the service.

BW: Yeah.

DC: So when did you leave Kingsley?

BW: I left in 1940.

DC: OK. And what . . .

BW: I came down here with a load of—with a guy that had a load of potatoes. It was a big semi load.

DC: OK. So down to Pontiac, or where?

BW: Yeah, I came right here to Pontiac, on Huron Street. Huron Street and Saginaw. That's where I got off. [laughs]

DC: OK. Now were they your potatoes or were you just hitching a ride?

BW: I just hoped to ride with the—I knew the guy that was the driver.

DC: OK. And when you left Kingsley, hitching this ride, what did you think you were going to do when you got here?

BW: Oh, I was gonna go to—I was called to work at the State Hospital.

DC: Oh, OK. Well tell me about that. How did you get a job at the State Hospital?

BW: I worked there about—well, I had to put in an application, and then when they called me—I put my home address, see, Traverse City. Or Kingsley. And they told me to report for duty, for work.

DC: Had you been looking for ways to get out of Kingsley?

BW: Well, there wasn't much—back then in those days, Dan, there was no work. I mean, there was work—farmers were hiring. They paid a dollar a day. Well, that's ten cents an hour. You work ten hours for a dollar. And you know that Pontiac Motors was starting to pick up a little bit after the Depression. And I worked the State Hospital, then I got a job at Pontiac Motors.

DC: So how did you hear about the job at the State Hospital?

BW: What'd I do? I worked in the diet kitchen.

DC: The diet kitchen. And how did you hear about that job?

BW: How did I do?

DC: How did you find out about that job?

BW: Oh, through—they were hiring at the time. They hired—the State Hospital hired a lot of people.

DC: But how would you even know about it. You're up in Kingsley . . .

BW: Oh, I got—we had a lot of friends that worked down here from Kingsley. They worked at the Baldwin Rubber, and a lot of them worked at Pontiac Motors. I had a brother that worked at Pontiac Motors.

DC: Your older brother?

BW: Yeah.

DC: When did he leave for Pontiac Motor?

BW: Oh, God, he left about a year before I did.

DC: OK.

BW: Yeah.

DC: What did your parents think about him taking off?

BW: Well, that—they knew some day he'd have to leave the nest. And you know, we were getting up there, you know, in age, where we should be doing something about our own life instead of having to—them do our laundry and everything and cooking for a bunch like us, you know. So we thought it would be a good thing for some of us to get out of there. And

then Uncle Sam took three of us at one time.

DC: Now it sounds like at least two of you were already down here.

BW: Yeah. My oldest brother and I.

DC: OK. So anyways, you came down here with the guy in the potato truck, all right.

BW: The semi truck.

DC: The semi truck, OK. And did you go back or did you stay—did you just stay?

BW: I—well really before that, I was about eighteen years old and a guy got me a job for a neighbor of ours. He was working in Detroit at Kelvinators. And he got me a job at a Greek restaurant. His sister married a Greek. And I worked on the—in the restaurant for about four or five months, I guess.

DC: So you had come down from Kingsley to . . .

BW: Then. That was before this last time. Yeah.

DC: Right. And was that restaurant in Detroit?

BW: I went down there—yeah, that was in Detroit. I worked at the Opera Lunch.

DC: What was it called?

BW: Opera. Opera Lunch. Was on the corner of—it was just a diamond shaped, V-shaped restaurant. And I was a counterman there. [laughs] I never worked—I worked on the farm, I never was a . . . [laughs].

DC: So what did you have to do as a counterman?

BW: I had to—well, I would serve people at the counter, you know, and take the—the people that ate out in the restaurant, I'd bring their check, you know, to pay for their meal or whatever. And that's what I did. I collected the money. [laughs]

DC: OK. How did you like it?

BW: Well, I got homesick, to be honest with you. I was only eighteen years old. So I went back, and then . . .

DC: Where did you live when you were in Detroit?

BW: It was some apartment.

DC: On your own or with someone else?

BW: No, just on my own. Yup. Then I did go to live with some people. I did—finally got wind of—before I went back home I got a job at Kelvinator, but they went on strike. And that's what sent me back home. I wasn't going to set down there without any paycheck.

DC: What did you think about Detroit at that point in time?

BW: Well that time, it was pretty good. Yeah, but it was a lot different—better, than it is today. [laughs]

DC: But still, if you put yourself in the mid-1930s—you came from Kingsley up in the farm country, northern Michigan—what was it like being in a big city?

BW: It was interesting. Yeah. I can remember these old, big old coal trucks. They were chain drive, you know, the drive shaft was up here and there was a chain that drove the back wheels. I think Mack Truck built them back then. They're still building trucks, Mack is.

DC: Were they delivering coal to . . .

BW: Houses. Homes. Yeah. Back when they had the old stoker stove. And some of them didn't have a stoker. They had a hand-fired. Yeah, they shoveled it in.

DC: That's what my Grandpa had. So you worked at . . .

BW: Did he live, your Grandpa live in Detroit?

DC: Actually in Midland, a couple hours away.

BW: Oh Midland, yeah.

DC: I remember watching him shovel the coal, until he got too old to be able to do that. You worked at Opera Lunch, then, for a few months. Then did you go back to Kingsley after that?

BW: Mm-hm.

DC: OK.

BW: Then I came back when I got a job at—this guy got me a job with that restaurant where his sister's husband—he was a Greek. And then I got a job—I went from there, then I went, I put an application in to Kelvinator. But I didn't work there for a month and a half when they went on strike [laughs].

DC: And that's when they went on strike, OK. And so then you took off back to Kingsley.

BW: Back to Traverse.

DC: Or Traverse City to Kingsley.

BW: Well, Kingsley, yeah. Really, that's where my home was.

DC: Right. And then did you stay in Kingsley until you came down with that semi truck load of potatoes?

BW: I stayed right there, yeah.

DC: All right.

BW: Yeah.

DC: So then you came down to get the job at the State Hospital, right?

BW: Yeah.

DC: All right. And tell me about the job there. You said you were working in the diet kitchen?

BW: Yeah. All I did was done dishes and prepared food. I prepared the food, you know.

DC: All right. How did you like that?

BW: [unenthusiastically] Well, it was a job. [laughs] Then I got, I got—I got a job after I lived there for awhile. I had my application in at Pontiac Motors and they called me and I went to work for them. I was piling fenders from—car fenders and hoods and stuff—from the '30s and I think up to '40. No, it was the '30s, early '30s, fenders and stuff for the old Pontiac car. They had a big warehouse down here on Howard Street in Pontiac.

DC: Now was your job to stack them up?

BW: There were a bunch of us guys. That's where we first started. Then I got laid off from there.

DC: How long had you worked before you got laid off?

BW: I worked from March until June.

DC: OK. And so was it just a temporary job when you took it?

BW: Well, no, it really didn't—but you didn't know—the economy. Well then I got laid off. I guess the economy kind of—the automobile industry dropped. And then I didn't even leave a forwarding address. I went to work from there—I went back to the State Hospital.

DC: Back to the State Hospital, OK.

BS: And worked in the—on the wards.

DC: What did you do in the wards?

BW: Take care of patients. About forty or fifty patients.

DC: Did you have any training for that at all?

BW: [laughs] No. No, they just hired you and give you a set of keys and say, "Here." Yeah, you worked under somebody, though, that knew what to do, what they was doing. But I worked there—I never left a change of address when I left Pontiac Motors. And I thought, "Well, they're starting to get ready for World War II." Pontiac Motors was starting to change over. So I went over there one day and I said, "Do you need any. . ."—I was looking for a job. The guy said—he looked up the record, my record—he said, "Where the hell have you been?" I said, "I've been right here in Pontiac." He said, "We've been trying to find you, but you didn't leave us a forwarding address." [laughs] So they put me to work within a week. I went back to work there then.

DC: And what job did they give you at that time?

BW: I was routing tools on government jobs.

DC: OK. All right. And let's see, would this be still 1940, or was this . . .

BW: Yeah, '41.

DC: 1941 now, OK.

BW: No, no, it was '40.

DC: Still 1940.

BW: Yeah.

DC: I want to go back just for a second, OK, to when you were stacking fenders. What was that job like?

BW: Well, we just put a—the fenders, you know, were all the same shape and form and everything. You just pile them one on the other. And we had to throw them in with—big stacks of them they had to move because they was moving in the war supplies.

DC: OK. All right. So they're making room. Were they heavy?

BW: You could pick one up by yourself, yeah. But there were about five or six of us guys. All

young guys like me. [laughs] We had quite a time.

DC: Was it hard work?

BW: No.

DC: Not really?

BW: Uh-uh. Not really. But we had one guy who was awful goosey and they kept goosing him, you know. Just about ready to put that fender up on that pile and he'd [laughs].

DC: Oh man. Anyways, you got the next job then and you said you were, let's see, you said you were routing something?

BW: Routing tools on the job. That's, yeah that's the—putting certain tools on this job and that job.

DC: So you're just getting the tools to the right place?

BW: Yeah.

DC: OK. And how did you like that job?

BW: That was good. Interesting.

DC: Yeah? What made it good?

BW: Huh?

DC: What made it good?

BW: It was interesting, because you had to make sure you got the tools, the right tools, on that job, see.

DC: Were you familiar with a lot of these tools?

BW: No.

DC: OK.

BW: I just—I learned from somebody. Somebody showing me, you know?

DC: Which plant was this in at Pontiac Motor? Do you remember?

BW: Plant 9.

DC: Plant 9, OK. And how long were you on that job?

BW: Till Uncle Sam got me.

DC: When was that?

BW: I left in December.

DC: OK. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, then?

BW: 19—it was 1942.

DC: 1942. OK, so you were on that routing job for quite some time.

BW: Till then. Then Uncle Sam caught up. I started in Fort Custer on New Year's Eve.

DC: OK. In '42.

BW: Yeah. And I was shipped there. From there, I was shipped to—after three months of training, I was shipped to Charleston, South Carolina. Never been in the South. Well, I'd never been out of the state of Michigan.

DC: What was it like in Charleston?

BW: Surprising. How they treated the black people. I couldn't believe my eyes. I just couldn't. I got on the bus to go to where I was supposed to—no, it was after I got there. I got on the bus one day, and I see this satchel sitting down beside the driver's feet, you know, and there was a Smith and Wesson revolver. And when a black guy got on the bus, he'd tell him, "Back end of the bus." The white people sat up in front. They had two different water fountains—one for black and one for white. I just couldn't believe what I was seeing. Just simply couldn't believe what I was seeing.

DC: Had you worked with any blacks at Pontiac Motors?

BW: [shakes head]

DC: No? OK.

BW: No. I did the last few years.

DC: But not early on, not in your first. . .

BW: See, I've been of out there since—I mean, I've been out of there twenty-eight years.

DC: Right, right. I guess I meant like in 1940 and 1941.

BW: No.

DC: No. OK.

BW: They—once in awhile you'd have—you'd see one. After the war we had a lot of them.

DC: Yeah. Well then where did you go after Charleston?

BW: Oh, they shipped me to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, the mud hole of the world. And I was there three, about three months, and I got a telegram from Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where they made the atomic bomb, and they wanted me and a guy from Traverse City—he was there at Fort Leonard Wood. They had orders for us to go to Oak Ridge, Tennessee. And we were on the security guard for all the security of what they were making. We didn't know what the hell they was making, but we was on security to guard it.

DC: To guard it. OK.

BW: Yeah. [laughs]

DC: Whatever it was. OK.

BW: They always told us they were making silk stockings, that's what they were.

DC: That's what they told you?

BW: That's what the rumor was.

DC: Oh, the rumor, OK. Ah. So how did you like that job?

BW: Well, that was pretty good. We had to—we had to check people in and out of the city. It was a little town that grew up overnight—Oak Ridge, Tennessee. And they had a civilian security for the civilian part and they had Army security for the restricted part. That's where we worked.

DC: How do you suppose you got chosen for that job?

BW: Through Captain Barnes. He was our, he was our topkick over here at Fort Custer. And when he left, when we left there, we got broke up after we got to Charleston, South Carolina. I was in an outfit that was three thousand guys they didn't know what they was going to do with. Just stayed there waiting for some assignment.

DC: OK. So they didn't get sent overseas?

BW: No, I didn't, but my brothers all did.

DC: They did. Where did they go?

BW: Two of them went to Germany and one went to the Pacific.

DC: Were they both—were they all in the Army, as well?

BW: Yup.

DC: And you got to Oak Ridge.

BW: Yeah, that's where I ended up.

DC: Did you stay there for the whole war?

BW: Yeah. I stayed there. I mean, I was stationed there for the whole war. That's where I got discharged. I got discharged from there, but they sent me to Georgia—Atlanta, Georgia, to get my papers. [laughs] Way down there and then back. And they paid me from Georgia to home, to Detroit.

DC: What did you think when you found out what was going on at Oak Ridge?

BW: Well, we didn't really—nobody, nobody knew except the people that were working on it. They were making the atomic bomb. The fission part, the stuff that they put in the atomic bomb.

DC: Yeah.

BW: And they shipped it to Los Alamos [pauses], [New] Mexico, I guess.

DC: Yeah, New Mexico.

BW: Yeah. That's where they tested it and that's where they set the bombs up for dropping on Hiroshima. That's my history, and then I came back to Michigan. Went back to work at Pontiac Motors.

DC: How long after the war was it that you came back?

BW: Uh, let's see—the war ended in [pauses] '44, didn't it?

DC: '45.

BW: '45. And I came home in '46.

DC: OK. You came back to Pontiac?

BW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

BW: March of ‘46. I had thirty-six months in.

DC: So they gave you credit for your time.

BW: Yeah, they gave me credit for my time at Pontiac Motors, yeah, while I was in the service. Three years.

DC: What did you do when you came back?

BW: Well! They was gonna put me in the foundry and I said no. I said, “I got discharged. I left here from Plant 9, the engine plant.” I said, “I’d like to go back there.” He said, “You be at work tomorrow morning.”

DC: OK. And what job did they give you?

BW: Crankshafts inspection. I never had—and they were six-cylinder engine crankshafts. And I never carried anything heavier than a forty-five in the service. [laughs] These things, these things weighed I don’t know how much. They were heavy. Oh man, they were heavy.

DC: So you had to move them around?

BW: Yup, take them off of the bench, put them in a holder here, and check for run-out, and you had to check them for size—gauge them for size, like a bearings. You had six crank bearings, then you had four—three, three or four, three main bearings you had to check.

DC: OK. How did you learn how to do that job?

BW: I had a guy show me.

DC: OK. How long did it take to learn what to do?

BW: Well, it don’t take long, but you’re not sure of yourself, you know, on something that you want to make sure that when you mark that crankshaft up on that bearing that it needs repair, you want to make sure you’re right because them guys on repairs, they come back there and tell you, “You better check your gauge.” [laughs]

DC: So they weren’t happy if you sent along something . . .

BW: Yeah. A lot of repairs that [?] reasonable. Well, I stayed on that job quite awhile. I finally got so I could keep up pretty good. But the general foreman on production—they was always riding me about getting that crankshaft going.

DC: What would they do when they rode you? What would they do?

BW: They'd stand there and, you know, just look at you. Make you feel like you're some kind of fixture. So I'd tell my foreman, "I can't keep up here. I just can't do it." So he'd go get another guy to help me.

DC: OK. Would they second guess your decisions?

BW: Well, no. But they knew I needed help because I was new. I hadn't worked very hard in the Army. [laughs]

DC: So the physical part of it was . . .

BW: Physical part was hard. I forget how many pounds they weighed.

DC: How many crankshafts would you inspect in a shift?

BW: Oh, gosh. [pause] Two or three hundred.

DC: Two or three hundred, OK. So in other words, for them to make that many automobiles, you have to . . .

BW: Well, for every engine, you had to have a crankshaft.

DC: Sure. So they're waiting for you.

BW: Yeah.

DC: How many others were doing that kind of work? You said you got help every once in awhile, but I mean, how many people were supposed to be doing that job?

BW: I think they had two inspection benches.

DC: So really, you two were in charge of making sure the engines got built.

BW: Yeah. Well sometimes this one guy would—if they had a breakdown or something, they'd take him away and do something else and leave you there alone, see? And by the time they got him back there, you done probably have a bunch of them lined up again that you, you run behind. Them guys that put them from the production line, they put out so many crankshafts. I don't know how many machines they had—four, five machines, and finishing machines. Grind the bearings to a certain size or something like that.

DC: So they're churning them out and then you have to inspect them before they can move on.

BW: That's right. Gotta be okayed by inspection.

DC: Yeah. So what did you think about the quality of the parts?

BW: [somewhat softly] Well, they were pretty good, yeah. They were pretty good.

DC: So what did you like best about that job?

BW: [pauses] The best part of that job was what you said went. If this crankshaft wasn't good enough for putting it in, you tell them. It's gotta be done right. There's a guy that buys that eng[ine]—car—he's gonna want something decent.

DC: So you had some authority, then, over what went on.

BW: Yeah. Yeah. We were a separate department. We were a department *in* the department. Inspection was always inspection, a department in the department. They took care to see that the stuff that's produced was made right, to the print.

DC: And what was the part you liked least about that job?

BW: [pause] The least part of it?

End of Side A, Tape I

Begin Tape I, Side B,

BW: . . . well, I really don't know, Dan, what I thought least about it.

DC: That's OK. There doesn't have to be anything. Were you a member of the union at that point in time?

BW: I'd been a member of the union—in fact, I was a member of that union when they had Kelvinator.

DC: Oh, OK, you joined the union . . .

BW: But that was a different, a different union outfit. But the UAW came up after that, see, in the '30s—the UAW came in in '36 or '37 and won the first contract with General Motors. And ever since I've been working for General Motors, I've been in their union. The union done a lot of good things for me.

DC: Had you ever come across any unions up in Kingsley?

BW: [laughs] No. No. I have now. In Traverse City. Yeah, because I have a nephew who works for [?] Gear. And he's one of their committeemen.

DC: But not when you were growing up?

BW: Oh, no. No, they never had nothing.

DC: So in this crankshaft job, did you ever have any need to use the union? Did you ever have any need to . . .

BW: No. I did further on in my other jobs in my life at Pontiac Motors.

DC: Well we'll get to that point eventually. So it sounds like you didn't really need to call in a committeeman for anything.

BW: No, I didn't.

DC: With this first job, anyway.

BW: I didn't.

DC: OK. How many years did you work at that job? The crankshaft.

BW: Crankshafts? [pauses] About three years, I guess.

DC: About three years, OK. Where were you living at that point in time?

BW: In Drayton Plains.

DC: OK. Did you have a house or were you renting a place?

BW: No, I—when I started [pauses] we rented a place.

DC: Oh, were you married at that point?

BW: Yeah.

DC: When did you get married?

BW: We got married—we just celebrated our sixty-second anniversary last Saturday.

DC: So you were married before you went off to service.

BW: Oh yeah.

DC: Ah, OK. All right. Well we need to go back, then, a little bit. Where did you meet your wife?

BW: At the State Hospital.

DC: Oh, OK.

BW: Yeah.

DC: What was she doing there?

BW: She was an attendant nurse. What they call attendant nurse.

DC: OK. And then you got married, what . . .

BW: May 10, 1941.

DC: '41. Yeah. OK. So let's see now. What—did your wife stay on working at State Hospital then?

BW: Well she—no, she went with me when I shipped out.

DC: She did, OK.

BW: She—then she worked down there in Charleston, South Carolina while I was stationed there.

DC: What did she do there?

BW: She worked in a meat market in the—[pause] what the heck was the name of that store? [pause] Can't think of the name.

DC: That's OK. Yeah. And then did she go to Oak Ridge with you, as well? In Tennessee, did she go to Oak Ridge?

BW: No, no. She came back home while I was still there and got a job back at the State Hospital. She worked there all the while I was in the service.

DC: OK. And how about when you came back and you worked in the crankshaft inspector job? Was she still working at the State Hospital then?

BW: Yeah, she was still working. We rented an apartment then.

DC: OK. That's when you rented the apartment in Drayton Plains.

BS: Yeah.

DC: OK. All right. So what did you do after the crankshaft . . .

BW: No, we didn't rent an apartment in Drayton Plains then, when I came back. We rented it in Pontiac, on Green Street.

DC: OK. I'm sorry. And then when did you move to Drayton Plains?

BW: Oh, God [long pause]—I think we moved there in 1946 when I came back from the service.

DC: OK. About the time you came back?

BW: Yeah.

DC: OK. What did you do after the crankshaft inspector job? You said you worked there about three years. What did you do next after that?

BW: Oh, I went on the [pause]—I was sup—I was utility man on the crank, or rod line. Cranking rods and the pistons.

DC: And how did you end up with that job?

BW: By putting in an application for a better job.

DC: So it's one that you wanted?

BW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

BW: Better myself.

DC: What made it better?

BW: Well, it was a lot less work. All I had to do was make sure that people was covering the job and that if somebody was off or didn't show up, I'd probably have to run their job.

DC: So you filled in for other people.

BW: Yeah. Just like a—what they call a utility inspector. I did that for—till I got, I got, what happened? [pause] I was on afternoons, and I wanted a day job. So I got off of that job. But the only job, day job, that was open was on the block line. Cylinder block line. So I worked on that for about three months, and I told—there's a job came open in the back in the receiving inspection. And I was the oldest one for that job, had the most seniority. And I got the job as a—working on carburetors, and I had that for twelve years. That's what I retired from.

DC: Oh, OK. Now I've got to try to sort this out. You just went through a long—a lot of jobs there. You said you worked twelve years in your last job. Let's see. Let's see if we can go through here and see if I can figure out when you had these jobs. When was it that you switched to the day job?

BW: Some time from pistons and rods.

DC: You switched to the cylinder block line because it was on days.

BW: That's the only job that was open for a day job.

DC: Do you remember when that was when you shifted to days?

BW: What year?

DC: Yeah.

BW: [chuckles] Not really, exactly.

DC: OK. Do you remember why you wanted to shift to days?

BW: Well, I was doing another job, a day job—a job that required you to be on days, see? After work.

DC: Oh, OK, you had a second job?

BW: Second job, see.

DC: What was your second job?

BW: I was a janitor for the Drayton Plains Post Office.

DC: Oh, OK. All right. So. . .

BW: Then—I was even their janitor after I retired.

DC: Really?

BW: [laughs]

DC: So I guess, you know, an obvious answer would be you needed the money with a second job, but . . .

BW: Well, that, somewhat. But you know, when you go from no—go from a job to no job, you have to have something to do. Something you gotta be doing. And—because you'll be just lost. If you don't have another job. These—a lot of these guys retire and they don't have another job, they set down in front of the TV.

DC: Yeah. But it sounds like you were working two jobs . . .

BW: I was.

DC: . . . when you were much younger though.

BW: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: And so. . .

BW: I had that job thirty-some years.

DC: Yeah. That's what I was wondering, you know, when you first took the two jobs, you had a full-time job at Pontiac Motors.

BW: Yeah.

DC: Why would you need a second job at that point in time?

BW: Well, we, you know, it's kind of rough. You know, the first year I came back from General Motor—from the Army, first full year I worked at Pontiac Motors, I made three thousand dollars. The whole year! We still had to live off of that and pay our rent and a lot of utilities.

DC: Was your wife working, as well?

BW: No.

DC: OK.

BW: No, we had a young boy.

DC: OK, you had a child. All right. Yeah. Did your wife stay home, then, with the baby?

BW: Yeah.

DC: OK. And so—let's see. I'm trying to figure out the time line here. During the 1950s . . .

BW: Yeah.

DC: Were you working the two jobs, then, during the 1950s?

BW: Yeah. Because I started that job in [hesitantly] 1950. '53. Or '54.

DC: Around that time. Did you ever get laid off from Pontiac Motors?

BW: Oh yeah. [with a knowing chuckle]

DC: Yeah? OK.

BW: Yeah. I stood in that—I stood in that unemployment line a lot of times.

DC: OK. Let's see. So it sounds like—I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like you needed the second job as a safety net maybe? In case . . .

BW: Yes, I did.

DC: Yeah. Because the Pontiac Motors job sounded like it was . . .

BW: Well, it wasn't—you know, we didn't get overtime. Barely kept going, and sometimes they'd just lay you off. Because business is—it was—the car sales were bad, see. And then sometimes we went on strike. There was no money coming in then.

DC: How did . . .

BW: You see, when I come out of the service there was a hundred and eighteen day strike. But I stayed— I didn't go back. I just stayed off and drawed unemployment the whole time, see.

DC: OK. Let's see then. What was the longest time you were laid off in the 1950s?

BW: Um, about three weeks.

DC: Three weeks, OK. All right. But it sounds like there were a number of times when you were . . .

BW: Well you always—just that one time. Times were—people thought that we really was living it up back in the day, but it was rough going. I've been living better now than I was then. After I retired.

DC: OK. Yeah. Yeah. And did you have more children, as well?

BW: We had another boy. And I had two step-children.

DC: OK. So did your wife bring them to the family, or how did this . . .

BW: We—the boys we raised. The daughter, our daughter, their grandmother raised her. So there was five of us in the family all the time, except when the oldest boy, he left and went in the service. Then when he came back he went to Arizona.

DC: That must have been much later, though, back in the '60s or so.

BW: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: OK. So during the 1950s, then, it sounds like that's when you shifted to the cylinder block

line to work days so you could work in the post office as a janitor.

BW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

BW: Well no, not in the ‘50s. That would be in the ‘60s.

DC: That was in the ‘60s?

BW: Yeah.

DC: Now I’m getting confused.

BW: Well, I thought it’s a job. I got a job. That’s all I was thankful for right then. You know.
BW: See, I’m—I worked one, two years—no, one. Two years I worked on the—in the old Howard Street plant. They shipped . . .

DC: What plant was that?

BW: Howard Street plant. They shipped me down there to the rocket job. This was—they didn’t have enough work for me up there in the other end of that Army job. That was an Army project that General Motors had. And they shipped me down there because they didn’t have enough work for all of us.

DC: What job did you get shifted away from?

BW: I was working on that, on the Otter. You remember they called—the one they called the Otter. [M-76 amphibious vehicle] And it was shipped down there where they made rockets. I don’t know what size or . . .

DC: Do you remember at all when this was?

BW: That was in the late ‘50s.

DC: Late ‘50s. OK. So you were getting moved around.

BW: See I was just like an extra. They didn’t want me—they’d need me here, so they’d put me in another—they didn’t lay me off. They just moved me around, see.

DC: OK. And what did you think about being moved around like that?

DC: Did you have any control at all over where you got moved?

BW: [shakes head]

DC: No?

BW: No. [laughs] No. General Motor did, but I didn't. I could call the union, but the union didn't have too much jurisdiction on what jobs to put me on, you know.

DC: Because you were in this utility category?

BW: Well I was a—just like a extra, you know? Like a pinch hitter or something. So they didn't have a job for me here, they say, "Well, you go down to Howard Street plant and work on the rockets."

DC: So it sounds like you didn't have . . .

BW: I could say, "I don't want to do it." "Well then, get the hell out of here!"

DC: OK. So you had to do it.

BW: Yeah.

DC: OK. Well what was it like working on the Otter and working on the rockets?

BW: Otter, I run, I worked—most of the time I worked on road test. Take them out there on that little lake on Montcalm. There's a little—Eagle Lake, I guess they call it. Not Eagle—can't think of the name of it now, but it's the little pond we used to take them out there and test them for leakage and stuff like that. And sometimes we'd go out about 12:00 and about twenty minutes to three, we'd just go back in. We didn't do any—much running of the thing. We just sat her under a tree [laughs].

DC: But it didn't *leak*, right? [laughs]

BW: Yeah.

DC: So your job was to test them, then.

BW: Test it. Yeah [mumbles].

DC: Did you have other jobs on the Otter, or was that pretty much it?

BW: Oh, I had some small jobs on inspection. Checking bolts and nuts and stuff like that.

DC: It sounds like you were pretty flexible. You did all kinds of different things.

BW: Yeah, we did. Yeah. They—this one outfit, there was—that had a contract with the Army that they had to make bolts and nuts. And some of them bolts would come with it cross-threaded and you get too many of those, well, we'd have to knock the whole shipment

down. We'd have to go back and tell the small companies, you know—you'd have to tell them, what you should do is have your operators check their work or have an inspector go around and check the work. Otherwise, you're gonna lose a lot of money. They might even cut you off.

DC: Right. Because they're shipping it all the way to you before they figure out they have a problem.

BW: That's right. Yup.

DC: Were you working at the post office during this time, as well?

BW: [nods]

DC: Yeah? How were you managing then? Did you ever sleep?

BW: Well, I only worked from—in the post office, I only worked from three till six. I'd get out of the shop at 2:30. Go home and maybe snatch a sandwich or something and go back to the—only had seven miles to work. So it didn't take long.

DC: OK. Short shift, then, at the post office.

BW: Yeah. And I'd go home, grab a sandwich, and then back. And at 6:00 I had to leave the post office. I had to go home and have dinner. [laughs]

DC: All right. And was your wife a homemaker at that point in time then? [BW nods] OK, yeah.

BW: Till the boys got grown up. Then she got a small job.

DC: What was that?

BW: She worked in the laundry.

DC: OK. So what did your family do as a family in those years, back in the '50s?

BW: Oh, we went—once in awhile we went on a trip. And the boys, they were all sports-minded. They always—something going on. They were in Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, I was a Cub Master. And the Scout—helped with scouting. Stuff like that.

DC: Yeah. Where would you go when you went on trips?

BW: We went up to—sometimes we went up, way up to my brother's in Manistique. Around to the lakes. And different places.

DC: Did you ever go back to the family farm?

BW: Oh yeah. Lots of times. A lot of times, yeah. That's gone now. The barn burned down and all that's left there is the house and the garage.

DC: Did the church remain a big part of your lives in the '50s?

BW: Oh yeah.

DC: Yeah?

BW: Yeah.

DC: What church did you belong to?

BW: Our Lady of the Lakes. You ever hear of that?

DC: I've heard other people talk about it.

BW: Yeah, it's out there on Dixie Highway. [a Catholic church in Waterford]

DC: Yeah. OK.

BW: Then I went—from there I went to [short pause] a Christian church. Then I went from the Christian church to a Presbyterian. And now I'm—belong to the Methodist church.

DC: OK. What prompted those changes?

BW: Oh, one of them was my wife didn't care for the Catholic Church.

DC: What did—did she grow up . . .

BW: She grew up a Presbyterian. And I went—the Methodist, or the Presbyterian church we belonged to, the steps were so high. You had to go up—she's got emphysema awful bad, my wife has. She's on oxygen all the time.

DC: Oh, OK.

BW: And—you've seen her here at the dinner with that snorkel.

DC: Yes. That's right.

BW: But then the steps got too high, too many steps—she couldn't hardly, well, she couldn't get up. By the time she got up to the top, she was all out of wind. So we told them—well, I worked on the committee different times to have a new—to have a elevator put in. But after we left there and went with the Methodist Church, they put the elevator in. Just got it done last year. So this is the way it is.

DC: Makes a huge difference for you. Yeah. Did your family have any objections to you marrying someone who wasn't Catholic?

BW: No. Well, there was some of them—a little, a little difference there, but not a big lot, you know.

DC: So they didn't make a big stink about it.

BW: No. They didn't. They didn't make any big to-do about it.

DC: Switching gears again, I've talked to a number of people who said that 1958 was a really tough year.

BW: It was.

DC: Do you remember what you were doing during that year?

BW: '58. Where was I? [long pause] I think I was still in crankshafts. I was in the 8-line. But I was a little more experienced at handling gauges and stuff. Yeah, I think I was—yeah, I was in the eight-cylinder crankshaft.

DC: Do you remember ever getting laid off in 1958?

BW: Yeah.

DC: Yeah? What did you do when you were laid off?

BW: Cleaned the post office. [laughs]

DC: OK, you stayed with that job and that was your safety valve.

BW: Just walked the picket line. We didn't have it really easy all the time.

DC: Mm-hm. So did you ever get involved with the local union?

BW: Not very much. They done a lot of good things for us.

DC: What things did they do that you appreciate?

BW: Just about everything. They—I had some incidents where I needed the union because, you know, somebody worked in my job when they should've worked me on the weekend, drew that big salary. You get triple time for it on weekends, see? They put—one time they put a, a salary man on our job. On a Sunday, checking carburetors, when I should've been in there.

DC: OK. So how did you go about dealing with that?

BW: They worked it out so I would get paid alternately.

DC: OK. Can you think of other instances when you needed help from the union?

BW: No. I didn't, I didn't really call a committee—I had a pretty good relationship with the company, the people I worked for. I had no, no reason to call the union, to call the committeeman.

DC: How were the foremen that you worked under?

BW: Good. I worked for a lot of foremen. They were all—they were all good. Yeah.

DC: What made them good?

BW: Their personality and things like that. And they looked out for your, some of your, your welfare side of you. Like a lot of times we'd have something happen over in another plant. We'd have to go over there and check it out. It was time to go home, to punch out. So your supervisor in this other plant where you was working, he would take care of your timecard because you didn't have to walk back there. Way back—sometimes you had to walk a half a mile.

DC: Yeah. Big plant.

BW: Yeah. They done a lot of good things. The company's been pretty good to me. General Motors has been good to me.

DC: It sounds like it.

BW: Yeah.

DC: What about your coworkers?

BW: Oh yeah, they always had—we always had—I always had a good relationship with my coworkers. No complaints.

DC: OK. So it seems like you moved around a lot from job to job. What was it like meeting new people all the time on these different jobs?

BW: Oh, it was an experience, you know, that you never saw them before or heard of them before.

DC: Did you like that variety or would you have preferred to have something familiar?

BW: No, I can get along. I can get along. I can strike up a conversation with anybody. Yeah.

DC: Were there any departments that you liked more than others?

BW: I liked that carburetor department. Receiving department. That's the department I liked.

DC: Tell me about that one then.

BW: Well, you made—see in carburetors, we had three different companies that furnished carburetors. And we worked on all of them. And they used to send their vendors in when they had problems, you know? And the vendors—sometimes we had to go through fifteen hundred or a thousand, or two thousand carburetors that had to be reworked. And the company, the company that was making the carburetors would keep us on the job till we got the job caught up. Sometimes we worked day and night. For one day and the whole night.

DC: So what would you do when that happened? Would you just call your wife and say, you know, "Honey, I have to work late."

BW: Call and tell them I'm gonna be—and the boys, one of the boys would go do the post office for me.

DC: Oh OK. All right. Yeah. That's helpful.

BW: Yeah. Yeah, we used to—I liked that carburetor department.

DC: So what about it exactly did you like so much?

BW: About what?

DC: You say you—you said several times you really liked it. But what exactly was it about that department or that work that you liked so much?

BW: Oh, the carburetors?

DC: Yeah.

BW: It was about how do you—we had to tear a lot of them down. You get big shipments—we had to go get samples. Different crates of carburetors. Go over them and see how much, how much was done wrong.

DC: So the process of inspecting them was something that appealed to you?

BW: Yeah. And if we had a certain amount of them that was wrong, we'd have to just—just reject the whole thing, the whole shipment.

DC: Would anyone get upset if you rejected the whole shipment?

BW: No. They sometimes would—the people that were running the assembly line for the engine, the engine line, they had to have a certain carburetor. Well *I* couldn't make a carburetor. They'd have to—so the company that made the carburetors would send a whole bunch of guys in there to rework them so they'd have carburetors.

DC: Would they shut the line down in the meantime?

BW: No, they'd set the engines aside, you know, until the carburetors got there. And then they'd have to put them on the line again and check them with the carburetor on. [laughs] It was an interesting job.

DC: Were there many women working with you in any of these jobs?

BW: Not many. There was three or four women worked back there in receiving inspection.

DC: OK. How did they get along?

BW: A lot of them worked out in the plant. They were pretty good. They were nice. Yeah.

DC: How did the men and women get along?

BW: As far as I know, they got along pretty good. Yeah.

DC: OK. Were there any African Americans on that particular job?

BW: No.

DC: No, OK. Yeah. You said there were more African Americans at the plant . . .

BW: There was one that worked in the office there. But he came in later years.

DC: You said after World War II there were more African Americans at Pontiac Motor. I wondered if you ever worked with black workers?

BW: No. Not many. I worked with one—in the crankshaft, but he was a—he was a heavy drinker.

DC: Oh really?

BW: He come to work when he felt like it.

DC: Were many of the workers heavy drinkers?

BW: Some of them. Some of them were.

DC: How did that affect everyone?

BW: Well, I don't know if—some of them, some of them just sneaked the drinks. Carried them in their toolbox.

DC: Did it ever affect the performance that—like that?

BW: I don't know that, they—some of them—I didn't notice any difference, you know? They were—they could handle it pretty good. I've seen a couple of guys that was on production, the production workers, get too much of it and then be sent home. I remember one of the guys on inspection, he would come to work one morning in his pajamas and his suit coat and house slippers. Drunker than a skunk. [laughs] Foreman told him he'd better go home and change his clothes.

DC: I guess so!

BW: And sober up. He was a heavy drinker.

DC: Yeah, that's a dead giveaway when you show up in your pajamas.

BW: [laughs] He was a—he was a heavy drinker. [laughs] Oh, I saw some crazy things that happened.

DC: What are some of those?

BW: One time we had—they had a new female. This was a black person. Ethnic person. And she came to work as a sweeper. Hired her new. And she came in in high heels and a dress on. [laughs] She looked like something that stepped out of the catalogue.

DC: Do you remember when that was?

BW: Oh, that was a long time ago. Yeah. That was, that was [pauses] back in the '60s. I don't know exactly what year it was.

DC: OK. Yeah. Showing up with high heels. What other kinds of stories do you have about these things you saw?

BW: Well—oh, I saw guys throwing towels at one another, you know, wet towels. [laughs] Throwing tomatoes at one another. Nothing real, you know, hazardous or anything.

DC: Did you see anyone get hurt on the job or anything?

BW: No.

DC: No?

BW: Oh, I sent them—seen them carry somebody out. He had a heart attack or something. I saw one guy die in receiving inspection. That was right after I come back from the war. I was— first week, first or second week I'm back to work. He was setting there in his chair there in the inspection room. It was profuse. He was perspiring, you know, and his shirt was all wet. They had to call the ambulance. That's the worst thing I ever saw.

DC: So you didn't really see any people have accidents on the job or anything like that.

BW: No. Where—do you mean were they bloodied or something?

DC: Well, just, yeah . . .

BW: I never did. It happened . . .

DC: I've talked—yeah, I'm sorry, go ahead.

BW: But this was in other departments that I didn't work in, that it happened.

DC: I've talked to some people who worked, you know, stamping presses and things like that.

BW: Yeah. No, I never did.

DC: OK. Yeah.

BW: They had a pretty good—General Motors got a pretty good safety record.

DC: Did you pay any attention to what, you know, the higher-level UAW officials were doing in the 1950s? Did you pay any attention to what Walter Reuther was doing or anything like that?

BW: Some, but the last ten years, though, there's been a lot of things going on. You probably know about the things that happened over in the truck plant. Where they had that long strike here a few years ago. [referring to a scandal in the 1990s at Pontiac Truck and Bus]

DC: I've heard about it, yeah.

BW: That's all I know. What I read in the paper, that's all I know. Those were individuals that were trying to fill their own pockets. By the way the thing read.

DC: I was thinking more about the 1950s, you know, back then . . .

BW: No. No, they done—I thought the union was doing pretty good. It gradually got a lot of things done that we have today now.

DC: Yeah. And when did you retire again?

BW: 1975.

DC: ‘75, OK.

BW: July 1. That’s eighteen, twenty-eight years.

DC: Yeah, coming on almost twenty-eight years. [pause] So can you think of questions that I should’ve been asking you that I haven’t been asking you?

BW: No, I think, Dan, you done a pretty good job. You take that and the tape and what you got written there . . .

DC: Yeah, I just kinda . . .

BW: And you can make quite a story with all the rest of the people you contacted.

DC: Yeah. Did you ever miss the farm?

BW: [wistfully] Somewhat. I did have—when I lived in Drayton Plains, I had about a half-acre garden.

DC: Did you?

BW: Yeah.

DC: What did you grow?

BW: Everything. Everything you could grow in a garden. I even had a nice big asparagus, asparagus bed.

DC: Did your boys help you?

BW: Not very much.

DC: OK. So things had changed.

BW: Yeah. Right. [laughs] Yeah. They all got good jobs. One is a security, head of security at Fort Hood, Texas. And the other one, he’s a human relations manager of a corporation over in Valparaiso, Illinois—or Indiana. That makes all the tops for beer and pop cans. Metal part with the tab on it. They make those. And, well there’s several plants in the United States that he’s connected with.

DC: Did either of them ever work in an auto plant?

BW: Well, the one at Valparaiso did. Yeah, they both did a little bit. A little bit, not much. Glen—he’s the one that’s in Texas, at Fort Hood—he worked over at Truck and Bus.

Putting doors on the big Generals they built there. And Duane, he worked in the block line a few times while he was in college. That's all.

DC: So they just got temporary jobs.

BW: Yeah, temporary jobs. Yeah. Yup. That's about the extent of it.

DC: Did they ever talk with you much about your work?

BW: No.

DC: Yeah, OK.

BW: They was—those guys, those two guys, like I say, they were mixed up in sports.

DC: What kind of sports did they play?

BW: Football. Wayne was in football in college.

DC: Oh, really? In college.

BW: Yeah.

DC: Where did he go to college?

BW: Northwestern.

DC: Really? Oh my.

BW: He went there and then he went to Grand Rapids Junior College. Then he went to . . .

DC: So would it be Northwestern Michigan like up in Traverse City, or . . .

BW: No, then—there's a college up there but they never went.

DC: OK. Which Northwestern did he go to? The one in Illinois or . . .

BW: No, the one in—or no, not Northwestern, but Western Michigan.

DC: Western Michigan, OK. There we go. OK.

BW: Glen, he didn't want to go to college. Glen spent eighteen years, or eighteen months, in Vietnam.

DC: Oh, did he? OK.

BW: Yeah.

DC: Was he—let's see, I'm trying to think. That would've been in the '60s, I take it?

BW: Yeah. He went in '68 or '69. And he was in eighteen months.

DC: So what was it like being in the plant in the '60s? You had the civil rights movement, you had the Vietnam War and stuff like that.

BW: Well, it didn't seem too much—it didn't seem to change too much.

DC: It didn't, OK.

BW: We had that big to-do there in '69, you know, when they burned up Detroit. Remember they had that . . .

DC: The riots in Detroit.

BW: The riot situation.

DC: What did you think about all that?

BW: Well, Dan, I thought it was terrible. But you know, I guess it was bound to happen.

DC: Did it affect people in Pontiac?

BW: Didn't seem to, but I don't know much about Pontiac. But they did have a big blowup here in Pontiac, you know, when they had that busing situation. Yeah. They burned all them buses up. That's the closest.

DC: Where were your kids in school?

BW: They was at Our Lady of the Lakes.

DC: OK, Our Lady of the Lakes. Yeah. And let's see, they would've been out of high school when? By the late '50s? No, I mean, by the '60s.

BW: Yeah.

DC: The mid-'60s. So before the busing.

BW: '62 or in there. Yup. Then I got a stepson. He's in Arizona, Phoenix. He's retired from National Cash Register. He's quite an electronics man. He's good with electronics. Yeah.

DC: It sounds like they've all been pretty successful.

BW: Yup. Yeah, they're all—then I got a daughter that's in bad shape. She's got emphysema bad.

DC: Oh, I'm sorry.

BW: She's worse off than her mother. Got oxygen a hundred percent.

DC: Is she around this area?

BW: Yeah. She lives in the same park we do. Yeah.

DC: Well, I'm sorry.

BW: That's what smoking done for you. I told her one day, I said, "Helen, I wish you'd quit them damn cigarettes." She said, "I don't want to hear it." [laughs]

DC: Damage is done.

BW: Yeah. I smoked, but I quit a long time ago. I chewed and everything. [laughs] Yeah.

DC: Better for your lungs.

BW: That's right.

DC: Not your mouth, yeah. Well I really appreciate you spending time talking with me.

BW: Oh, I did. It's interesting.

DC: I'll go back over the tape—if I have some more questions I hope you won't mind if I give you a call.

BW: No. OK. When you go back and make the—you're going to turn this around a little bit. Yeah.

DC: Well, what I'll do is I'll type out, you know, the transcript, the words.

End of Interview