Andy Wojcik Interview
Local 653 Union Hall
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Transcribed by Daniel Clark

DC: . . . even since September. There have been a couple of guys who signed up on my sheet, but they've had health problems since.

AW: Oh.

DC: It's just a shame.

AW: Uh huh. I get a big laugh, because everybody asks me, "Are you Polish?" See, I tell them, "No," I says, "My Dad's Polish."

DC: OK.

AW: My Mother's French and Irish.

DC: Oh is she.

AW: [laughs] See, my Mother's name was LaRue [sp?]. See my Dad, when he come from the old country, he was only seventeen. All his friends, they were hired to go over there, by the Chicago Lumber Company—they had these big signs up. I seen them down in the museums in Lansing. They have these signs up: "Help wanted. Work in the Woods." Husky young guys, you know. The put these signs up in Europe, you know, they hired these guys and brought them back over.

DC: Was that your family that . . .

AW: My Dad, yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK.

AW: And anyway, he come over with his friends, and they worked in the woods. And they come into Ellis Island, and he said that they were warned, he says, "Don't you cough," or "don't you limp," because if you do they would send you right back. See, this is what gets me. They were real strict down there, on things back then. And now, they let any of these crumb bums in. You know, these radical things, you know. Especially these Arabs, right there. In my way of thinking, if you don't like—my Dad had that feeling, saying that he was from the old country, but he told, "If you don't like it here, leave."

DC: So where exactly where they from?

AW: My Dad was from Lublin, Poland.

DC: OK. Uh huh.

AW: And then he was—like, my grandfather had a big farm up there—well, he was considered a rich landowner, because he had forty acres and a team of horses. Over there, that would be considered wealthy. Here, it would be nothing, you know.

DC: Right. So when did he come over the United States?

AW: 1913.

DC: 1913. OK. Do you know why he decided to make that trip?

AW: Oh, just an adventure. Young guys, you know, they can make money, make more money, you know. It's supposed to pay good, you know.

DC: Where did he end up originally?

AW: Why, he ended up originally up in the U.P. [Upper Peninsula of Michigan]. Up in the U.P. In fact, he worked for my grandfather for awhile, and that's why they let my Mother—because my Mother had been married before. Her first husband was a friend of my Dad's, and he died. He was a Polish guy too. But anyway [coughs]. It gets me, like they come into Ellis Island, and there's supposed to be a two-week quarantine. Well these guys marched off that boat, and they looked so good, he said, you know, that they lined right up and standing at attention right there. And this guy in charge of Ellis Island says, "That's the best group I've had through here so far. He says, "Chicago Lumber Company wants you." Back then, the Chicago Lumber Company was like General Motors today. And then he said, "They need you, and they need you right now." And they were divided up into three groups—part went to Michigan, part to Wisconsin, and part to Minnesota. For the work in the woods. They said that's what they brought all these—because back then there was no chain saws. All they was those big old cross cuts, and that was all. They had to have husky young guys to do all that work, cutting those trees.

DC: My grandfather did lumbering up by Grayling here.

AW: Did he? Yeah. Oh yeah, I've been through that big museum up there, and that stuff.

DC: That's where he worked. How did they get, then, from Ellis Island up to . . .

AW: At Ellis Island, they had a train that was waiting for them. The guy says, "There's a two-week quarantine, but that's off." He says, "You guys are going right now." He rode on that train—they'd get them all on the train, and they hauled them up there, divided them up on the train, you know, so many went to—three groups. So many went to Minnesota, so many to Wisconsin, and then . . .

DC: So was it your Mother's father who gave him work then?

AW: Well, he was a subcontractor for the Chicago Lumber Company.

DC: OK.

AW: And they dropped my Dad off, and a bunch of other guys to work. He needed men for the woods, see. He was like a subcontractor, see. They brought all these young guys in to work for my Grandfather in the woods, see. And he worked—and of course, then, my Dad went to the—he was in the Polish-American Army. He went—they drafted him, you know, more or less, which was kind of a funny deal. It's like the Bay of Pigs. They took all these guys they sent over there to Europe—and he was over there in 1916, before we were at war.

DC: Right.

AW: But they were assigned to the French Foreign Legion.

DC: Oh.

AW: So he fought with the French Foreign Legion there.

DC: So he went right back to Europe, in just a couple years' time.

AW: Yeah. Uh huh. And they fought in the French Foreign Legion. He was a Sergeant of a machine gun squad, and then they went from there—you get a big laugh about my Dad because he—the French had these ["chit-chat"?] machine guns. They were a lousy gun. They would jam up easy because the magazines were open. But my Dad—he liked the German guns. He said they rushed the Germans and my Dad took the German guns.

DC: Oh OK.

AW: And so he started using German guns. Well the officers, "Well, what is this?" My Dad said, "These are better guns. We'll use these." And the officer said, "OK, we'll get more." [laughs] One thing about the Germans, they're smart, and they're good on a lot of stuff. We built Browning—John Browning invented the first machine gun, and the Kaiser got it from him.

DC: OK.

AW: And see, then he licensed it, and patented it, and he got so much [gun?] whenever [mumbled]. That's really something. A lot of your best weapons are made right here, and our politicians can't see to—you know, the woods for the trees.

DC: Yeah, they try to make money off those weapons, and it can come back to haunt us.

AW: Well, you gotta have weapons. You need self-protection, you know.

DC: Sure.

AW: Because, like my brother, he was in B-29s. They flew him in B-29s, a million dollar airplane back then. That was the most expensive plane ever built. But he firebombed Japan, and he said that when they bombed Tokyo, five square miles they just burned it right down. All he dropped was phosphorus bombs, all the time, incendiaries, because most of the buildings were nothing but plywood and paper, wax paper, and stuff like that. And he says that they burn. He says you get up there at 35,000 feet, you could smell flesh burning down there. But hey, see my Mother's cousin—one of the Larue's—her son—she had two sons at Pearl Harbor.

DC: Yeah.

AW: One was on that *Arizona*. Seventeen years old, and he was on that *Arizona*, see. The other one was on a destroyer. He got out. The older one. But the younger one—because a lot of people don't realize that that *Arizona* was a training ship.

DC: Oh was it?

AW: It was a bunch of kids, like seventeen, eighteen years old. Most of them were all kids. Those were the ones who got killed. They were murdered. Most of them in their sleep. So, I get carried away at that, the most.

DC: No, I understand. It's very personal to you.

AW: Yeah.

DC: I'll let you go ahead and fill that out [the release form, which he's holding]. I'm interrupting you for a second, and then I'll get back to some more questions. [pause]

AW: . . . because Mr. Wilson was hiring these Polish veterans, because they'd fought the Bolsheviks.

DC: Ah.

AW: See, you don't realize it, but you look in the paper, and look up history, there was a lot of Communists and Bolsheviks in this country that were causing trouble—blowing things up, and—so my Dad was a very anti-Bolshevik. He didn't—he was Polish, and of course the Bolsheviks were mostly Russians. And Poland is a little country in between Germany and Russia, and it was fought—for a thousand years they fought, both countries. You know, they got a Polish saying, I can't remember it exactly, but what it means is, "Beware the enemy to the North."

DC: OK.

AW: [Laughs] What's the date today? [still signing the form]

DC: Today is the 29th. January 29th. Was your Father eager to go back and fight?

AW: He went back there, and they fought, and then they left France. And they went to—went up to Poland, and they fought in the Polish Army. And they fought the Bolsheviks up there, and they beat the hell out of them, see. And my Dad had his machine gun set up—he brought those, remember, German machine guns up—and they had a bunch of Germans fighting with them too, see. And they—the thing of it was, that they fought one battle, he says, they fought that—for four days, they had to move those guns three times because of bodies piled up so far in front of his guns. He said he couldn't raise his guns—elevate his guns anymore. So they had a—they'd fight one gun at a time, and pick off and go back. He had three guns, see, and they'd get back there and set their guns up another two, three hundred yards further back.

DC: Oh my.

AW: But they drove the Bolsheviks out of Poland, you know. They got them out. And that's why my Grandfather liked my Dad so much, when he come back, especially, because he had fought in the French Foreign Legion—with my Grandfather being a French—Canuck, see. And he thought my Dad was the greatest, because he had fought in the French Foreign Legion. Had his medals and stuff and all. In fact, he could have stayed in France. They wanted him to stay. He could have—if he wanted to stay in Poland, he could have stayed there, and he could have stayed in France.

DC: Why did he come back?

AW: Why, his friends, and my Mother. My Mother, and all his friends up North.

DC: So had had already met your Mother? Was he married at that point?

AW: Uh, my Mother was married at that time.

DC: OK.

AW: But he had met my Mother through my—through her first husband, who was a friend of his, see.

DC: OK. All right.

AW: Her first husband—my brother's Dad—he was a good guy, but he was an alcoholic. He was a bartender, see, and he couldn't handle the booze. Hell of a nice guy, my Dad says. You couldn't meet a nicer guy, but he couldn't handle the booze. You know, he'd get drinking, and go off the deep end.

DC: What happened to him?

AW: He died.

DC: He did.

AW: It just killed him, you know. It will do that, you know. It's a shame.

DC: Do you remember [intercom interruption], did your Dad go back to work at the lumber . . .

AW: Yeah, they went back to the woods, to the lumber. And then he went to Sault Sainte Marie, and worked at the Union Carbide. And then all my Mother's family—all my uncles and aunts and everybody—all come down to Detroit. See back in the '20s, around 1920, after the First—'21, '22 they come down to Detroit, to work in Detroit. And my Dad—he belonged to the Polish veterans in Hamtramck. And this one guy says, "Why don't"—he was my Dad's Lieutenant in the Army—he says, "Andrew," he says, "Come down to Pontiac." He says, "Mr. Wilson at Wilson Foundry is hiring. And he's hiring, preferably, Polish veterans, that had fought the Bolsheviks." My Dad got back to Wilson Foundry over there, and he hired in, and they took him downstairs with all these new guys they hired—they had a room down in the basement. They had about 150 rifles lined up in there. He said, "These rifles are for you guys, if we're invaded." Because they were worried about the Communists and Bolsheviks trying to take over.

DC: Wow.

AW: A lot of people don't realize, we come close to revolution back then.

DC: This is the early 1920s?

AW: Yeah.

DC: Were your parents married at that point in time?

AW: Uh, yeah. They come down and then—my Dad come down to Pontiac first, and my Father went to work, and he couldn't rent a house or an apartment, so he bought a house, in the south end of Pontiac, over on Rockwell St.

DC: OK. Getting back to the woods for a second, then we'll head back down to Pontiac. Were any of those lumber jobs unionized jobs?

AW: No. See, there wasn't no union back then. Yeah, guys organized, but, uh, it used to be either the guys worked their tails off—and like my Dad says, the bosses were pretty good. And it was a lot of work. And if a guy was a real asshole, they just—everybody'd walk off and leave him. See? So they were organized among themselves, more or less,

you know. And they'd say, "Hey, we'll go to work down the road a ways. The guy treats us better down there."

DC: OK, so they could actually work on a different crew if they . . .

AW: Yeah, different gangs, you know. Different companies, see. And, see, they fed pretty good, at the lumberjacks. They fed them sometimes five meals a day. They'd get great big, big breakfasts, and a big supper, and they'd have a bunch of sandwiches they'd bring out there and stuff. Because the guys worked so hard. Yeah, and they'd work it all right off.

DC: So what did he do at Union Carbide then?

AW: At Union Carbide they made that—what do they call it? I'm trying to think of it? It's used to make gas, they used for acetylene. They made all that stuff right there, at Union Carbide, in Sault Ste. Marie. He worked there for awhile, but then he left, and he come—when he found out about Pontiac, he could make more money. And he come down to Detroit, he worked at Dodge Main. And my Grandpa come down, my Grandpa worked at Ford's. And he was, of course, older, and he was a sweeper. We was up—a funny story in the family, that they all wanted—back then, they were real fussy about, you had to have a Ford. Well my Grandpa didn't have a car, but he would ride with my Uncle. My Uncle had an old Chevy, 1926 or '27 Chevy. He was a carpenter. He laid floors in bowling alleys—Jack Ryan, my Uncle Jack. He would drop my Grandpa off at the Ford—well, they didn't like to see him come up in that Chevy, see. And he told them, "It's not my car, it's my nephew's car." And he says they kept after him, and they called him down to the front, and one guy wanted to fire him. And so, they took him up before the superintendent. Well the superintendent was a French Canuck. Well, my Grandpa could start rattling off French. He says, "What's the big deal?" He says, "About me not having a Ford car?" He says, "I don't want no car. I've got a truck." Well, he'd bought a big Ford Model T truck, and they took it up on the farm, where he could use it on the farm. Because what it was, back then, he had the contract on his farm up there, and he would buy hay, timothy hay for the Detroit Police Department. He shipped all the hay down from up there in the U.P. They had the best hay up there—the composition of it—for the horses. For those police horses, see. And they—he said they needed that truck to haul the hay into the railroad yards to load it in boxcars to ship it back down here to Detroit. But he'd also buy hay. He couldn't raise enough, so he'd buy it from other farmers too, see. He had his hands in a lot of things up there. But that's when he come down here, though, because he said he could make more money. See, you'd work your tail off up there and you're still not making very much. My wife now, her Dad is from Rudyard, which is just outside of Sault Ste. Marie. But my Dad come down, and they went to Detroit, and they come to Pontiac. They hired him right into Pontiac.

DC: What did your wife—or what did your Mother do? What was she doing when she met your Father?

AW: Well, she was helping her sister run the meals, fixing the meals in the lumber camp for the lumberjacks. And she went out there and was working with her sisters, a couple of her sisters. In fact my Aunt Maude and Aunt Ethel, lived in Brimley, they would—my Aunt Maude come down to Detroit and she worked in a big restaurant. She was kind of the head cook in one of the big restaurants. She was really good, you know.

DC: She honed her cooking skills, for large groups anyways, up there, it sounds like, then came down . . .

AW: Yeah. Yeah. Because they cook good in the lumber camps. They had to, because to keep the help. That was a big thing. The first thing the guys ask, how the food was.

DC: Oh, OK.

AW: Before they even ask what the pay was, see, they'd ask how the food was. See, a lot of your people from the factories all come from the U.P., up north. Upper Michigan, plus the U.P.—a lot of them come down here.

DC: I've talked to a number of people, and it's amazing—I talked to someone who came from North Dakota, someone from Ontario . . .

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: You're the first person from the U.P. that I've talked to. I know that there are plenty more.

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: West Virginia, Arkansas.

AW: All over the world.

DC: All over, yeah. Yeah.

AW: I know that—well hey, if you got a job, you gotta go where the money's at. Young guys have to do that. That's all.

DC: When did your parents get married?

AW: They got married back in—it must have been about '25.

DC: OK. All right. So, it sounds like your Father, then, would have come down several years before that.

AW: Yeah, he come down a couple years before my Mother, and got situated in a job, and all that stuff.

DC: So, your Father started out at Dodge Main, you said?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AW: And do you remember what he did there?

DC: No, I don't. He worked on the motor line. The motor line. But then he went to Wilson Foundry, and then he worked on the—he made more money at Wilson Foundry. They worked on piece work.

AW: He'd never made any [??] in his life.

DC: So Wilson Foundry. And was that in Pontiac, Wilson Foundry?

AW: Yeah. That was in the south end of Pontiac.

DC: OK. I'm still learning my industrial geography.

AW: Yeah, they went—General Motors bought them plants all up, and bought their property too. But they made engines for the old Falcon Knight—there was a bunch of these cars they used to make back then, you know, that they quit making. But they also did the Willys, you see. Made that engine.

DC: What was that one?

AW: Willys. Willys-Overland, you know. The Jeep company. See, they made the motors for the Jeep during WWII, see. But, they were a busy place, and, like I say, my Dad was there, and they paid better money there. But, once when the Depression hit, he got laid off. And then he had to go—he went to work at Pontiac Varnish. And that was a non-union shop, which my Dad didn't like much, but it's still—you got to take what you can find.

DC: Was C.E. Wilson a union shop in the '20s? I can't imagine it was.

AW: Uh, it wasn't a union, but it was, probably would be more like a company union.

DC: OK, a company union. All right.

AW: Yeah, and they were organized. But they were pretty good, you know. And if you had complaints, you'd go up there and you could raise hell with them, and they would straighten it out.

DC: Oh really?

AW: Yeah. Yeah. And Mr. Wilson would—took good care of these guys because he knew they had been through a lot, you know, and they had fought the Bolsheviks, see. And which he was—in fact, he bought the first land for the Oakland County Sportsmen's Club. And he donated the money, and he bought the first property, because he was a pistol and rifle shooter. And the guy was—let's put it this way: if all businessmen and factory owners were like him, we wouldn't have had the trouble. See, like Henry Ford—Henry Ford was a good man, but he never invented nothing. He used to get other people's ideas, and improved on them. In fact, one of the Polish guys, my Dad's buddy, was—I can't remember his name now—but he was, worked at Ford's, and he was a pretty sharp guy. He was—like my Dad couldn't read or write, because over in Poland, most of the readers and writers were Jewish, because they'd go to their schools, and be taught by the rabbis, you know, in the synagogues. Where other schools, the Russians closed them all. They didn't want nobody educated. They tried to keep the people ignorant, like, to keep them under control. This was the old theory, back then years ago. But anyway, he was over there in Poland over there, and they, they took things like that, and they come back, this buddy of his that he was with, was one of the officers, he worked at Ford's. And he was pretty sharp. But he had some good ideas, and he sketched out a pad on different things. And I always get a laugh at this story, because—my Dad did too, he says—because he come up with this idea. One day he came up to Mr. Ford, and he called him aside, finally, was trying to catch him aside by himself. He said, "Mr. Ford, I've got some ideas I wrote out here. I'd like to have you look at it. I think they're—they could save us a lot of money." Well Henry Ford took those and the next day later, he come down and put that guy in an office. And he said, "That's your office. You stay there and you think me up some more ideas. And Harry Bennett come by. Remember Harry Bennett was—well, he was the asshole down there. I got another story to tell you later about him. But anyway, Harry Bennett come down and complained about "What's that guy sitting in the office?" And Henry Ford said, "Leave him alone. He give me an idea that saved me a million dollars already, and I just put him in there and told him to think me up some more ideas." See, and this is what Henry Ford was. He was smart enough to use people that were good. And he paid them, and took care of them, and that's how he could make money.

DC: Sure.

AW: You se, and this is what you gotta do. You can't, you can't—you get the best help you can. See, I was a metal model maker. Prototype work.

DC: OK.

AW: And they offered me salary jobs five different times—twice at Fisher Body, and three times over at Pontiac. I turned them down. The last time I went with a job they offered me, I wanted to get into Dyno-Lab [?]. I was going to take a Dyno-Lab job. But the job paid less than what I—I would have taken a 90 cent an hour cut. I mean, so, you know, the job I had was—I used to work with John DeLorean, on the GTOs. And it was really

good. A lot of hot rod stuff. I used to like the hot rod things. So they put me to work with him.

DC: Let's back up a little bit here so I can not lose my train of thought.

AW: OK.

DC: Where were you born, anyway?

AW: I was born here in Pontiac.

DC: You were born in Pontiac. And when was that?

AW: I was born in 1930. March 31, 1930.

DC: So that would have been . . .

AW: All the other kids were born up north.

DC: OK.

AW: In the Sault. My Mother's family, see. But I was born here, and my two sisters were born right here in Pontiac. And I graduated from Pontiac High School. I went—well, see, I went to Pontiac High School. They hired us right out of Pontiac High School for trade school.

DC: OK.

AW: And I retired at 60. I took an early retirement at 60. I had 42 ½ years there.

DC: OK, yeah. Yeah.

AW: See, the reason I quit—I was going to stay, because I liked my job, until Chevy took over. When Chevy took over Pontiac, we got a bunch of crap work in here. Because when I worked for Pontiac, we had good jobs—a lot of hot rod stuff, and a lot of specialty work, and all. You know, I worked on a lot of the things that were really—oh, the GTO. That was one of my projects, to try [?] setups for the GTO, I worked on with John DeLorean. And you know how that—you that—I will say that John DeLorean left, but you know when he had that DeLorean car? We worked on parts of it here in Pontiac. He wanted to bring that out under GM's name—Roger Smith wouldn't let him. That's why he quit, and left to set up his own company.

DC: It sounds like you enjoyed that kind of work.

AW: Oh yeah, I did. I worked a lot with stainless steel. See, I was one of the top guys in stainless steel. And I'd get stuff in, and work it all up—and I told them, I says to John, I

says, "Why don't we make them out of stainless?" And he says, "That's a good idea. I've been thinking about that." And I says, "Hell, Henry Ford built, was it, ten '37 Fords, all stainless steel bodies." And if you ever see any old Fords around—I know a friend of mine, several of my friends keep [magnets?], so if they run across a Ford body that's a stainless, it would be worth a fortune. You see, for collectors' items, because there were only ten of them made. I think they recovered six or seven, but there's three missing—they don't know what happened to them. And same with [Henny's?], that Chrysler [Henny?] engines. [hard to understand] If you can get one of those, well that's worth quite a bit of money. I worked a lot on 454s—[Chevy?] high outputs.

DC: Let's kind of work up into that. We'll talk about that again, before this interview is over. I'm sure of that. But what was it like growing up in Pontiac?

AW: It was good.

DC: Yeah?

AW: Good. I mean, uh, there was black kids back then. We had our gangs, with black kids and white kids, and there was fights—fistfights. But nobody shot nobody. Nobody knifed nobody. You may get a bloody nose, and that would be it.

DC: What kinds of things did you fight over?

AW: Well, just "I'm tougher than you are." I mean it was nothing—it was nothing—we didn't have the racial stuff back then like they got now. You know, I mean, they talk about it being better today, and I think back when I was growing up kids got along. We never had no trouble. And in fact, I used to walk to Pontiac High School, right down [Bagley?] Street, right through, they used to call it Colored Town, right through the middle of Colored Town, and I'd go there back and forth every day, my buddy and me, and we never got in no trouble. He was a black kid, but he had blue eyes and red hair.

DC: Oh, OK.

AW: His Daddy was Irish and his Mother was black, see. And everything was all mixed up, see. Because I was kidding him one time about his Mother being from down South. He says, "Nah, my Mother's from Canada, same as your Grandpa."

DC: Is that right?

AW: Yeah. You know, before the Civil War, all the slaves had run across into Canada, you know. But I mean, when we grew up, Pontiac was a good town back then. We used to go to the midnight show—we were 10, 11, 12 years old—we'd walk at midnight down the street and nobody bothered us. There were police cars out there, and they'd go by, slow, and just look, and see we were just a bunch of kids, you know. But growing up in Detroit was the same way, because I had cousins lived—the Ryans—one Aunt Maude, she married one of the Ryans down there in Detroit, in Corktown, and they lived down

there. And Detroit was a good town back then. It was mostly white though, see, because during World war II, towards the end of the war, they started bringing a lot of blacks up from down South. And a lot of them were from this Alabama, the jungles down there. And they were—they weren't like the colored people up here. They were like a bunch of animals, a lot of them. They got loose, and they would—I know that my cousins down there, they would get after some of them down there, you know. They would—you know that—some of the ones that would antagonize some of the girls there, see, they would—and the cops would down there too. Cops would stop and they had these patrol cars, and if any black guys got out of line, that's the way—they'd whup the hell out of them with clubs. There weren't no NAACP much back then, no. But if you behaved yourself, they treated you good. That's how they kept things in line, in Detroit—it was a good town back then, because Detroit supported most of the state of Michigan, all the industry and stuff. And now it's—it's a rat hole now.

DC: Let's see, did—I'm trying to think—you would have been in high school, then, right near the end of WWII . . .

AW: Yeah. I would be, like—in 1945, I was 15 years old. I remember I was a big kid, because I learned to drive—friends of ours, these Polish people, Mike [Kravicky?], had a farm up by—actually, it was outside of Elsie, Michigan, over by Owosso. And I would go up there and work every summer, because there was nobody that would work on the farms. I drove a tractor.

DC: So you did that during the war then?

AW: Yeah. All summer long—as soon as school—the day school let out, I went up there. They'd pick me up, then, on the farm, and I'd drive a tractor all summer long until school started again. I learned to drive when I was 10 years old. Had my—driving a car when I was 12—and I had my license when I was 14.

DC: Hmm. OK.

AW: The farm kids, they did that up there, see. Because they were working, especially during the war.

DC: Sure. How about during the school year? Did you work then?

AW: Oh yeah, I worked at different jobs. I worked at Singer Sewing Machine. I worked at [name?] Sheet Metal Shop. And I worked at all different kinds of jobs. I finished up—before I went to Pontiac Motor, I worked at A&P Store. I got 95 cents an hour, which was big money back then, you know. Back in '48.

DC: What did you parents do during the war?

AW: Oh, my Mother died.

DC: Oh, she did. I'm sorry.

AW: She died in 1942. She died of dropsy, which is congestive heart failure—and high blood pressure destroys the heart and the kidneys. And my Dad, he died—of course is was quite a bit later—he died of coronary thrombosis, which is, his arteries were plugged up. And I got—what do they call that now?—trying to think of the name, of the terminology, but I got both, so I got to take medication for both. Thank God for General Motors for the medical plan, I tell you that. Insurance—my pills, and my wife has—what she takes, it would probably cost me about $400 a month just for pills.

DC: How did you get by during the war after your Mother died?

AW: Well, my Dad raised me and my two sisters. And we worked—I was going to a Catholic school. My parents put me in a Catholic school there. And my Mother did—she wanted me to be a priest. I almost went to a seminary, but I had a falling out—in fact I kind of dropped out of the Church. I don't know—what church do you belong to?

DC: I grew up in the Methodist Church.

AW: Methodist Church? Well my wife is Baptist. But I grew up in the Catholic Church, and everything else like that. But I had one of these priests—you hear a lot of talk about these queer priests—hit on my buddy, and we wound up—said "the hell with . . . "—not the seminary, but the priest's house with ball bats. We wanted to work him over, and we were only, like 12, 13 years old. And of course they had a fit about that, you know. And of course the one kid told his brother, and his brother was a paratrooper that had been home—wounded—home on leave. He come down there too, kicked the door in. He was going to kill that [hesitates] S.O.B. if he got a hold of him. While they moved him out of town. You see, it's one of the things I've got against the Catholic Church, is they cover up these homosexuals. As far as I'm concerned—I've got friends that are gay—but if guys are gay, let them get together and go off among themselves. What they do behind closed doors, I could care less about. But I don't like them picking on kids, little kids, see, like that.

DC: Yeah, right, yeah.

AW: Little girls either.

DC: It's wrong, whether you're gay or straight, it's wrong.

AW: Yeah. And then, that's why—I think that's one of the faults of the Catholic Church. I think that priests should be married, like the old Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches. Because he ain't going to get out of line because his wife will keep him in [laughs].

DC: Well, that sounds like it made a big impression on you.

AW: It did. It did. Awful big impression. And my brother—he was an older brother now—he was an alter boy—he used to go to Church and he dropped out too, and he married a Presbyterian lady, you know. So he's a strict Presbyterian now, and Mike and I—I don't go to, really, any church. But I go to all the churches, to me . . . But my favorite actually is the Greek Orthodox.

DC: Really?

AW: Yeah, because the priests are married, and a lot of the ceremonies are the same—the old-fashioned ceremonies, and things like that. You ever look at those ceremonies in the churches and stuff, it goes back to the time of Christ. You see this is what peeves me off about these Arabs. These Arabs were fighting way before our Lord Jesus Christ was, you know, born. People been fighting over that land—Hashemites and the [Dominites?]—in fact, I've been pretty active reading the Bible and stuff, and you go to religious school—and you read about these people that have been fighting over there for thousands of years, and they're still not done. And they—I don't know how you feel about it—to me, they shouldn't allow those people in our country, anybody that's a radical, you know—unless—see, when my Dad come in, this guy got up and told them, "You fellows coming to the United States now—we've got Germans, Russians, Poles here—any frictions or any animosities you had between you is left right here. You're going in now—we're all Americans. We're all going to be Americans. And the guys—that's the way—the Europeans did it that way. But these people can't.

DC: I don't know. It's unclear to me, but it seems like an awful lot of Arab immigrants are as loyal as anyone else.

AW: Most of them are! Because they got this one guy, down in Detroit, the FBI's going around checking on houses, and I got a big laugh about this one guy. They went to his house; they were looking for Sammy, Samuel something—I can't remember. It was a funny last name. It was an Arab last name. And he said, "Well, he got our letter. He's supposed to contact us. We were wondering what happened." He says, "What's the matter with you guys? Don't you know?"—his Dad: "He's in the Marine Corps! He's an interpreter. He's over there right now.

DC: That's a classic story.

AW: Yeah. So, idiots—most of them are pretty good. But you got a few of them that are, you know, that are radicals. Just like my Uncle. My uncle, Uncle Jack Ryan of Detroit, was Irish. I had another uncle, Al [Dent?] was English. He was from Liverpool. Now you couldn't meet two nicer guys, by themselves, but get them together and there'd be a fight. You know, just over animosities that go back hundreds of years.

DC: What was your Father doing during the war?

AW: He went to Pontiac Varnish.

DC: He stayed on at Pontiac Varnish?

AW: Yeah. He stayed right there until he retired. He was making camouflage paint. For Army Trucks. He camouflaged all the Army trucks [?]—then the different stuff they painted for—the light colors for desert warfare. And that was his job. He was working with the paint. My Dad couldn't read or write much. But he had memorized the formulas for paint, for mixing paint. He was sharp, see. If he had had an education, a chance, he could have went a long ways. In fact, he worked—at one time he worked at one of the mines up north there, for a few months, when all the timber industry was down for the summertime. He worked in the mines. And he went up there, and he says they had one of the cars coming up out of the bottom of the mines, jumped off the track, and they couldn't get it back on. And the foreman was having a heck of a time, and he got—him and the owner got in an argument, and he quit, walked off. My Dad come over and said, "Well I'll get that back on the track for you." And the boss said, "Go ahead. You get it back on the track, you've got the job." And my Dad got a couple of timbers, like railroad ties as levers—just used leverage.

DC: Yeah, right.

AW: See, like, they talk about the pyramids. All your pyramids were built strictly with levers. Leverage, moving those big rocks, and those big stones up. Well, he put it back on the track and got it running and got everybody back to work. And the boss said, "Well, you got the job." My Dad says, "I really can't take it." He says, "I can't read and write to take records." The boss bent over and says, "Well, I tell you what. For a few weeks, you run the job on there and I'll take care of the paperwork. And he certainly did there, until the timber thing got started back up.

DC: Did he ever learn to read?

AW: Uh, a few words, but not very much. I think my Dad really was this, dyslexic. Yeah. Because I think he seen everything ass backwards. He was sharp though. That old boy, his memory, until he died—when he died in the hospital. He had a stroke, of course. And when he had a stroke, his memory—he thought he was back in the trenches in 1917. He had a time in bed, he kept calling me "Charlie." He thought I was his buddy Charlie. You know, this is what your mind does. It's like a computer—it's scrambled when you have a stroke.

DC: Right. Right.

AW: So that's why I take an aspirin a day. You should do that too.

DC: I should. Yeah.

AW: Yeah, because I know, my daughter-in-law, her sister, her youngest sister had a stroke here. And she's only 36 or 37 years old. She had a stroke. And her left side is half paralyzed, so you don't know about that. But she smoked a lot too, see, and that's bad.

She owned a restaurant there—Italian. My son married this gal. She's not Italian—Sicilian. That's a story right there. We went down to the big wedding. They had a—he'd been—my oldest son is deaf. And she's deaf. He met her at the Detroit Deaf Club, see. And so her folks put a bid wedding on, a big Italian wedding on for them. We went down there, and he says—her folks said, "You come over here and sit with us. Us Sicilians are sitting here. The Italians sit over there."

DC: Oh.

AW: See Italy, it's like the North and the South. Because they had a civil war there about 500 years ago, and a lot of Sicilians, they ain't forgot it yet [laughs].

DC: You saw it right there.

AW: Yeah. And they tolerate the Italians, but they don't really, you know—but they're nice people. But like I say, you watch yourself, and anybody else, you know, if they're taking an aspirin a day. Like they tell us—I heard from this Army guy down in Camp Perry—if you have a heart attack, the first thing they do is drop—my buddy had a heart attack, the first thing they did was take two aspirins, put them in his tongue.

DC: Really.

AW: Take some aspirins. They kind of thin the blood, you know. They give them to him and get him to the hospital as fast as they could.

DC: Obviously, yeah, with your family history, and I have some history of heart attacks in my family and all.

AW: Well, you keep—that aspirin a day will be more help than anything. Watch your diet, and keep away from the booze as much as—you know, like my doctor told me—he's Italian to. He's a Sicilian, you know, Dr. [??] He's the heart doctor. He's really good. But he says half a glass of wine or a half of glass of beer every once in awhile is OK. It's good for you. But, he says, not to drink, because it will get you. Anything to a—like, I got to lose weight because I'm 235 pounds right now, see, and I'm usually best when I'm about 200 pounds.

DC: Oh boy. It's hard, losing it.

AW: Well that's like, getting back to you, when I was up on the farm there, I'd have guys stop me when I was thirteen years old on the street and ask me why I wasn't in the Army.

DC: Oh, they thought you were that old.

AW: Yeah. I was a big kid, see. I even had gals hit on me. I'd go into the tavern there, just to have a Coke, you know, with the other guys, and they said, "Well, if you want a beer, you can have a beer." Well, I says, "Well, I'm not old enough." He says, "You're big

enough; you're working like a man, you can drink like one if you want." Well I said, "I'd rather have a Coke." [laughs] But you know, my wife now, she was a little peanut, and she got into the movies until she was fourteen, when the limit was twelve years old.

DC: So you're at the opposite ends . . .

AW: Yeah. She was five foot tall and I was six foot, almost six foot two, see. I shrunk now. I'm down to about a little over six foot.

DC: So tell me about when you graduated from high school. What options did you have? What did you do at that point in time?

AW: Oh, that's the reason I left the Catholic school. One of the biggest reasons—the reason was kind of the priest and also, the biggest reason was I wanted to get into shop classes.

DC: OK. So you went to Pontiac High School then?

AW: To get into metal fabrication, which I got straight As in all my metal fabrication and machine shop. And then I went—if you got good marks, they hired you right into trade school. You had a choice: you could go to either Pontiac Motors, or Truck and Coach, or Fisher Body.

DC: So how did you know that you wanted to go into the metal trades like that?

AW: My Dad told me. My Dad's friend was a German fellow, up at the top of our street. He was a die maker. My Dad says, "I want you to go to school and be a die maker, tool maker." He said, "You'll make twice the money I do." He says—and this guy had a big LaSalle, and all. Us kids would go up there—we'd be about six of us, we'd wash his car all down, he'd give us all a quarter apiece, which was [?] scale, you know. But we'd scrub his car all down, clean it all up, and of course we'd go to a show for 10 cents back then, and get a candy bar. We'd have a ball, you know. So everybody looked up to him. We didn't look up to doctors or lawyers, or nothing like that. You know, toolmakers and diemakers—that's what—kids my age back then, that was what you looked up to—skilled tradesman.

DC: So he's the one who recommended that you go and get that training.

AW: Yeah. Get that training.

DC: Did Pontiac Varnish ever have a union?

AW: They have now.

DC: They do now. But how about when your Father was there?

AW: When my Father was there, they never did have one, no.

DC: Never did. OK.

AW: But the boss down there was pretty good. Anybody wanted—the guy who owned it, Mr. Hutchins—in fact I worked for him mowing his lawn, cut the grass and stuff like that—and I worked there. And I even worked for, out to Wabeek Estates, for Senator Couzens' place out there. It used to be Couzens on Long Lake Rd.

DC: OK.

AW: This is where all the big—Wabeek Estates now is a great big subdivision now. But back then it was lawn, and it was just a big two smaller houses. When I got out there, I was working, and of course, Frank Couzens, he was, come back—he had been a Colonel in the Army, and he'd come back. And he ran Wabeek State Banks. See he owned—they were in the banking situation. These people aren't millionaires; they're multi-millionaires. And I kick myself because this one daughter of Frank's was after me. She was kind of a fat girl, and I didn't pay much attention to her. And I kick myself. I often think I should have married her, you know.

DC: Could have been on Easy Street, huh?

AW: Oh yeah. If I had known then what I know now . . . But I got along good there because when—they were from Canada, French from Canada, and they were Catholic. The priest didn't go to their house; it was the Bishop. See, and the Bishop come out one day, and I stood there, and I took off my hat, and I says, "Good morning, Bishop." He looked at me and said, "Oh, are you Catholic?" I said, "Yes sir. I go to the Catholic school in [?], St. Fred's." "Oh Good," he says, "Frank, take good care of this boy here." And so I got along pretty good with the whole family. We all did. They were nice people out there.

DC: And you had that French Canadian connection, it sounds like.

AW: Yeah.

DC: Well back to your training in high school and all, how many years did you spend at Pontiac High School?

AW: Well, from the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th.

DC: Oh, you went straight through.

AW: Yeah. Because I left St. Fred's in the 7th grade, and went to Eastern Junior High School. And from Eastern I went to Pontiac High. I was taught at Pontiac High School by Jack DeLorean [means Kevorkian, the assisted suicide advocate], the doctor, you know? He went to Pontiac High School. He graduated in 1946. My *Quiver*, I got my '46 *Quiver*, has got his picture. I knew him in school. He was kind of a nerd though. See, it was kind of divided into half. A lot of it was industrial arts—that's where the wood shop,

pattern shop, print shop, and all these shops they taught kids back then . . . Because we didn't have any—there was no colleges around, unless you wanted to go to Wayne State, or wanted to go to Lansing, or something like that. And working people—my parents couldn't afford to send us to college.

DC: So college never entered your . . . .

AW: No. My Dad was really tickled pink. I graduated, see, from high school, see, and then he thought that was really great and all.

DC: Sure.

AW: Nobody in his family had ever done that see, and he never did either. Of course when I got into trade school, that was even better yet, you know.

DC: So what did you do right when you graduated? What did you do—let's say you graduated from Pontiac High, and then what did you do?

AW: Went into trade school.

DC: Went straight to trade school.

AW: Yeah. They hired us—they'd take us right into trade school right from the school.

DC: All right, so who ran the trade school?

AW: Well, it was, uh, it was the bosses over there. I'm trying to think now—it's been so long ago . . .

DC: Was it affiliated with a factory?

AW: Yeah.

DC: Which one?

AW: Pontiac Motor Division.

DC: Pontiac Motor. You were at Pontiac Motor.

AW: I went to the one at Pontiac Motor.

DC: I talked to someone else who went into an apprenticeship over at Fisher. So you were at Pontiac Motor.

AW: Yeah.

DC: So , they recruited you straight out of high school. You went right straight into this . . .

AW: Yeah, right into this shop.

DC: Tell me what that was like.

AW: It was, kind of good. They were—I, of course, didn't get along too good with some of the bosses down there.

DC: Why?

AW: Well, their—actually, I always said it was a foreman's training school, see, because a lot of guys went to trade school and got to be toolmakers and that, and then they ended up making foremans out of them see. And see, salary and I—I know the guys; I get along with them. But I got a habit—that's one of the reasons I wouldn't go on salary, because I usually tell things like it is. If I thought you were an asshole, I'd tell you, you know. But you can't do that when you're on salary. You gotta bite your tongue, and, you know—some things were . . .

DC: So how did they behave, or what did they do at the trade school?

AW: Oh, you had certain projects. You worked on different things. And you worked on—like I worked on, much of the time I was there, I worked on making sleeves for pistons, for the old Straight 8s. They still had a straight-8 engine yet, you know. And well they did, they did so many cylinder blocks, that were—they were—had been bored oversized. Like the valve guides, or this was any other parts, and they would—we would make cast-iron sleeves up for them, and repair them. See, they would get so many blocks piled up—they would get a couple of thousand blocks piles up. They they'd go through and bore them out and repair them all.

DC: OK. And who was supervising you while you did that?

AW: Well the foreman there.

DC: The foreman was.

AW: At the trade school. They had to get some of the guys that had been there for a couple of years already, kind of like a leader group. Actually most of the guys, after you've been there for awhile, you kind of run things.

DC: Did you learn a particular skill, or . . . ?

AW: I started out a repair machinist.

DC: And would you try out different skills, different trades there?

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: Would you rotate from one to the another, or something?

AW: Oh yeah, different machines. You worked on the grinders, the lathes, the [?], and you'd work on these different things. You'd work on different dies. And see, just like my apprenticeship, a lot of my—I was a repair machinist, but I spent a lot of time in the die room.

DC: OK, but when you went into this school, did you know what trade you were going to be in when you came out? Or were you exploring?

AW: I was exploring. In fact, they wanted me to be an electrician.

DC: Oh really? OK.

AW: And I thought about it, but a few weeks before I was supposed to go in, there was a guy—I went down to the plant—a guy reached in the box, down there, and it blew up on him. He had a wedding band on, and it caught the wedding band, and it burned his finger right off and threw him out away. And then, I know in those old electrical boxes—I know, what is it, TCP or something, the chemicals they put in there?

DC: Yeah, PCB.

AW: They used to blow up. Maybe once in awhile they get so hot it would blow. And these guys, a lot of guys got hurt in those too. The union raised a lot of hell about those too, you know, because guys getting hurt. Lucky nobody got killed, but a lot of them were burnt pretty bad. The one guy lost his finger, you know.

DC: So he wasn't killed?

AW: No, the cover hit him, just threw him against the wall. Put him in the hospital for . . .

DC: It was enough to make you think twice about being an electrician.

AW: Yeah, I told them I didn't want no part of it. I'm going to take anything else but that.

DC: How long was this trade school program?

AW: Four years.

DC: Four years, OK.

AW: Well, it was so many hours. I got it through in a little over three years. Because we worked overtime, a lot of overtime, see.

DC: So if your hours added up, you could graduate early.

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK. Let's see, so you came out a toolmaker, right?

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

AW: . . . the people in the die room. And I'd worked there, see, as part of that, so they shipped me over there, and I worked on the machines. I worked on dies. I built the roof die for the 1956 Chevy Nomad and the Pontiac—it's that fancy two-door station wagon. The roof—the dies for that, all the grooves right down there. Yeah, I remember, I worked on that one. I worked on that machine. Then I got a chance to go to mechanical engineering. That's where—when I went in there, they said, "Well, you're supposed to be a pretty good machinist. We heard about you." And I says, "Yeah." I says, "I can run about anything." And he says, "Well, here's a Bridgeport." I said, "Bridgeport? What's that?" He says, "You never heard what a Bridgeport is?" I said, "No." We didn't have any of that hot rod machine. We had all the big stuff over in our place. I says, "Hell, that ain't a machine." I had—they had a cutter bigger than that Bridgeport. It was a six-foot diameter cutter, you know. I'd shut it off, get down there with a big old coal scoop shovel, shovel the [?] snips out. Because we worked on the rough dies and quarter-panel dies, see.

DC: Now we're going to have to slow down here. You're going to have to explain some of this to me, because I've never been in that at all. So I'm going to ask you to try to explain what you were doing to someone who is basically a dummy. This is interesting. You came out as a repair machinist, but they didn't have a job for you there. They had room for you in the die shop.

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK. So had you had any training in that kind of . . .

AW: Oh yeah. It was part of my apprenticeship. Well, part of every apprenticeship, you work on all the machines.

DC: Right.

AW: And I worked on dies over there.

DC: OK.

AW: So hell, I fit right in.

DC: So you were OK. So tell me what you started out doing. What was your first day on the job like, when you showed up over there?

AW: Well, first time on the job there, I was out there, we—they needed some help on a motor. And the second day I was there, I smashed my hand all across there, all the bones on my hand. You can still see the scars there.

DC: Oh my goodness, what happened?

AW: Well, we had put this motor—well the boom slipped and come down and caught my hand between the boom and the motor see. So that put me in the—this is something else too. I thought the company was great because of the way they took care of me. They run me right down to a specialist down in Detroit—a hand specialist. They fixed my hand all up, and brought me back to the shop, and said, "Well we're gonna—you go home. We'll drop you off home, but we want you to come back in the morning." I says, "Well, aren't they going to put me on sick leave?" He says, "No, no." He says, "You come back," and he says, "in fact you get a couple of hunting and fishing magazines if you want, and bring them in with you, something you can look at, and we want you here." So see, I thought that was great. Well, I come to find out later, I know why they did it. Because later in the year, about, oh, a few months later, I got a chance to look at my records, and out of my records it said, "Hand injury. No time lost."

DC: Oh.

AW: For insurance purposes, see. For their compensation and their stuff, they would do this. So I got a pretty good deal. In fact, I got a clipboard and learned to write left-handed, my clipboard like that, writing down all the parts and all the inventory, and all the parts in the—machine repair parts and the tool man room parts. And they were pretty good though. The company was good. The union was there. Of course I joined the union the first chance I got.

DC: And why did you join the union?

AW: Well, because friends of mine belonged to it, and a couple of bosses were, you know—I didn't get along too good with them. It was little personality conflicts.

DC: Can you give me a for-instance? What happened?

AW: Well, we had this guy named Bill [Kipp?]. Now he was a real asshole. And he was an alcoholic. Well he would drink, and he would b—the first of the week, Monday—like maybe he would be drinking over the weekend, and he would still have a hangover. And he was ornery as hell. By about Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday, he would kind of mellow out. He wasn't as bad. The guy had problems anyways. I look back on it now, I probably should have felt sorry for him. Because a couple of times he got after me and I

threatened to beat him up. And see, this is why—but I was smart enough to make sure nobody was around, to hurt me. [laughs] If somebody did was, one of my buddies wouldn't hear nothing—that's what we—and sometimes some of these foremen guys could be real yahoos, you know.

DC: So what would they do to antagonize you? What would they do to make you mad? One guy was an alcoholic . . .

AW: Yeah, but he was sarcastic. Comments, and sarcastic . . . and what was it now? Let's see, one time he made a crack about a Polack. You know, like that. I said, "At least I know who my Dad is." [laughs]

DC: You gave . . .

AW: [laughs] And so I give it to him right in front of everybody. And boy, that really hit—the guys were all laughing at him, see, then, see. And you know, little things like this, see. Now most of the bosses were real good. Mr. Volker—Mr. Volker ran the trade school. He was in charge of it.

DC: He ran the trade school?

AW: Yeah. He was in charge of it. He was a real good guy. But this—it was this other guy that were real yahoos.

DC: What made Mr. Volker a good guy?

AW: Well, maybe he didn't drink. I don't know what the deal was, but he was a real mellow guy, and everything was pretty good on that stuff. I got along great with him.

DC: How long did it take your hand to heal?

AW: Oh, about a month and a half. In fact, they gave me a rubber ball. I'd run around flexing it, you know, and stuff. And I come there one day, the boss come down, and here I got a big piece of plank, and I got a whole sack full of nails. I'm beating nails in. And the boss says, "What's going on?" And I says, "Well I'm practicing trying to get my hand in shape," and I says, "because I want to build me a house." I got lots out by Crescent Lake. I bought lots out to Crescent Lake there for $200 apiece, right by that lake. And they were—you know, I kick myself I didn't buy about fifty more, you know. I bought three lots out there. Like I say, the bosses were pretty good, but you know—but I could do pretty good work too, and I was pretty, you know, sharp enough, I could handle myself pretty well.

DC: So how did you get work assigned to you?

AW: Well, we'd have projects. Something was broke down, you'd have to fix it.

DC: OK. Tell me how that would work. How would you . . .

AW: Well, you'd get an assignment, say—well, see, they'd put me anyplace. I could handle it. I could be on the lathe, working in the shop if they needed lathe work. But if the work was caught up, they needed—a press broke down, a crankshaft broke—say a big crankshaft for the quarter-panel dies, or for the roof dies—if they broke the crankshaft, I remember one time I went out there, and this [boss] was out there, and I looked at that crankshaft and I says, "Hey, we got the wrong crankshaft. I *think* we got the wrong crankshaft." He said, "You don't get paid to think. You get paid to work." This asshole. And I says, "OK, if that's the way you feel about it." And so, we're getting the stuff all ready, and he got the crankshaft all washed off, all the [?] off of it, getting it all hooked up, with the big cables, getting ready to put it up there. And the superintendent, big John [?] comes by, and we got it up there, and he says, "That crankshaft don't look right." I says, "Yeah, I tried to tell him it was the wrong one. We got the left hand instead of the right hand. This one belongs on the other side." He looked at it, and he said, "Didn't you tell him?" I says, "Yeah, I told him. I told him I thought we had the wrong one. He said I didn't get paid to think; I got paid to work." Well he went over there and just chewed him all out something awful. He said, "The next time somebody says anything, you check on it before you [laughs].

DC: So what would you do when one of these machines broke down? What would be the first thing you'd do?

AW: Get a big tag—"Do Not . . .—turn off the power and put big safety tags on them.

DC: OK, so that line's down.

AW: Locked right up, and they'd shut the whole line down, and they'd move the guys to some other place to work.

DC: OK. And then what would you do?

AW: We worked. We worked through our breaks, work through our lunch hour, until we got that press going again. Because, we were working one time, I remember we worked all morning until about, oh, almost 2:00. And we got the press going again. And I got the production going. Of course, they would have the guys work overtime, because they needed quarter panels.

DC: They'd be behind on quarter panels.

AW: Yeah. They were behind on parts. So they'd put the other guys on some other lines, working on some other stuff, and they brought them back and put them all there. And it was a good deal. We had a lot of good work—what I say about bosses, most bosses we had, 90 percent of them were good guys. It was about 5 to 10 percent that were assholes.

DC: When you went to a broken down machine like that, would there be a boss right with you looking at the problem? Or would you . . .

AW: The group leader.

DC: The group leader?

AW: Yeah.

DC: Was the group leader management? Or was the group leader union?

AW: The group leader—he was union.

DC: He was union. OK.

AW: He was union, but he was just like a straw boss.

DC: OK, so you got the group leader for the group . . .

AW: Yeah, he would go over there—the guy with a lot of experience, so, you know, and he'd get there. And I'd work with him. He'd have me doing different things and stuff, you know, because I was pretty sharp on all that stuff and he knew that I'd help him out.

DC: How many guys would it take to go and solve a problem like that?

AW: Oh, we'd probably have anywhere from at least six guys, maybe sometimes eight, depends how big a hurry they were.

DC: How many worked in your department?

AW: Uh, it was usually around fourteen, fifteen guys.

DC: OK, so you might have half your crew . . .

AW: Half your crew would be out on that one job.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

AW: They'd pull out—in other words, we had small parts—like they made parts for the arm rest, parts for different things. And they had welding shop. They'd take all the guys—if they had a breakdown, they'd pull all the extra ones, they'd pull right out of there, and they'd put them on this hot job.

DC: OK. All right.

AW: Yeah, because something broke down. Then again, same with the floor pan welder. If it broke down, they had to pull the guys out of the other parts. And you know, whatever broke down, that's what got priority.

DC: Sure. Did you ever have more than one breakdown at a time?

AW: Yeah.

DC: What did you do then?

AW: The boss would get on the phone and call the second shift guys in early.

DC: Pull them in, OK.

AW: Yeah, pull them in early. Of course, we made some good money over there too—double time, time and a half—and I know I used to kid the boss because I made more money than he did. Because you see the bosses didn't get double time or triple time.

DC: OK. They're on salary.

AW: Yeah. See, and they offered me salary jobs. I says, "Hell, I can't afford to take a salary job." [laughs] You know, we made some damn good money, because I used to buy a new Bonneville for my wife every year. A new car and all. And I'd get a company car, and get one of the—when I got over to engineering, I'd get one of the engineers to drive it for me, you know.

DC: So your money was that good?

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: When did you get married?

AW: I got married in 19—my wife graduated in—I graduated in '48, and she graduated in '50 from Pontiac High School, and we got married in '51.

DC: OK. All right. Yeah. And what was your wife doing at that point in time?

AW: She was working down at the Kresge Store, at the corner of Saginaw and Huron St. The big old Kresge Store—it's the building down there now.

DC: What was her job there?

AW: She was a clerk, in retail. That's what she took in high school—retail. Sales.

DC: So, did her family move down as well then?

AW: Well, her Dad did.

DC: Her Dad did.

AW: Like her Mother, I get a big kick out of her. Because a lot of people—her Mother was French, but her Mother's from the reservation—north of Lansing, Potawotomi Reservation, see. That's where they got the Indian casinos. We always talk about—like they got these casinos, and I always kid them, because my Grandpa now, he was French, and he was from Bay Mills.

DC: Right. I know where that is.

AW: He was part Indian, but now he had to swear up and down he wasn't Indian because he had a saloon. See, back in the—well, 1900—if you were Indian, you couldn't have a—or 1800 even—you couldn't have anything to do with whiskey. See my Grandpa, though, he had to swear up and down he was no Indian, see, he was just French. [laughs] He was. He was part Indian.

DC: Whatever suited at the time.

AW: Well, yeah, you just went along with the flow, you know.

DC: So you got married in 1951, and that would have been just before you got out of trade school, it sounds like.

AW: Ah no. I got out about '52, I finished up. Because we were married, and we got married—we had an apartment we rented for $10 a week.

DC: OK.

AW: You know, three-room apartment. There's always a thing too, there's friction too, because my first new car was a '49 Ford. And the only reason I bought it, though, was I had a '47 Chevy, and my Dad pulled out in front of a big Lincoln, and knocked the front end off of it. So they fixed it—well, it went down the road sideways, and so the only way I could get rid of it is to trade it. Other dealers wouldn't touch it. But the Ford dealer looked at it out the window—he didn't go check it, see. Of course afterwards he did a lot of yelling. I says, "Hey! You took it. That's yours."

DC: Made a deal.

AW: Yeah.

DC: So was it a problem driving a Ford where you worked.

AW: Ah, a little bit. It was quite a few guys had Fords, so—because they were cheaper, and it was . . . . I worked on this farm. We had Fords up there. We had a Model A . . .

DC: Up at Ovid-Elsie area?

AW: Yeah, we had a Model A and we had a '35 Ford, and a '39 later. One time I remember that '35, I was [?] mechanical brakes. I went right through the barn door one day. Not through—I pushed it up. I hit the barn door, and knocked the stakes out where they were in the ground, not in cement. But I pushed the door and up—cars were built so heavy back in those days, I backed it up, and there was red paint all over that black Ford, on the hood and on the fenders. It didn't hurt it a bit. I just got some gasoline—I wiped that red paint off, nobody ever knew about it.

DC: It would be a few thousand dollars worth of damage now.

AW: Yeah, yeah. It would. The cars back then really were built. A lot more solid.

DC: So tell me more about this job. I'm still trying to—what did you like best about your—this is at Pontiac Motor, right?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK, and what did you like best about that?

AW: Probably the guys.

DC: The guys.

AW: The guys. This is why I come to the union hall. See, I don't miss the company. I left to retire from Pontiac Motors, I ain't been back. Since I retired in '91. I can come to the union hall and meet the guys that I used to work with, the people you knew all your life.

DC: Did many of these guys come through the trade school with you?

AW: Quite a few of them. A lot of them come from different places. I worked with guys that had worked in the coal mines, guys that had worked in the lumber—the timber industry up there, and they worked in, maybe, repair work, you know—that same type of machine repair. And all over the country. We had people from out West, and out East. A lot of people come from the clothing mills—the factories, but they would come—they used to [?], well they would—and they would—say they were laid off, they'd come here and go to work. Because we got people all over the country. I met people from all over the country that worked here.

DC: How old were the guys you were working with?

AW: Oh yeah, they were anywhere from 18 up to 50.

DC: Really.

AW: Yeah, even older guys. They'd hire older guys in, because they were good mechanics, and good skilled tradesmen. They'd hire them in. But sometimes we got some dummies, too, you know. We had one guy they hired in, and he was from down South, supposed to have worked in the coal mines, supposed to have been a maintenance man, but he didn't know nothing. And he had—I come up to the boss, and I says, "Hey boss, where do we keep them there augur bits?" Well, drill bits—augur bits is the old wood mill. Well, that's a new one—that machine there, nothing like that. He said, "What the hell you talking about?" I says, "Our new guy you got there. He just asked me where we keep them there augur bits."

DC: The olden days.

AW: Yeah, the old thing you use on repairing barns and such equipment.

DC: What was it like working with someone who wasn't up to speed?

AW: Uh, I'd let him know what I thought about it. Now some of the guys were pretty sharp, and I'd show them once, they knew it. Most of them were pretty good. They'd been with—most people, to get in any kind of skilled trades, had adapted pretty well to it. Now anybody that showed—that tried to do it, I would help them. But if he didn't, I would—"Hey, I'll carry you for a little bit," you know. But most of the guys were real good.

DC: Did you find any difference in perspective between the guys who were, say, 40-50 years old and you young guys, who were in your 20s?

AW: Oh yeah, yeah. Of course.

DC: What kind of differences?

AW: Well the older guys were—trying to get set up and, you know, and they'd talk to me about different things, I'd tell them, I says, "Hey, you can't beat this area, once you get in here. You get your seniority established here, you're set for life." That's the way it used to be at Pontiac Motors. Once you got in and got your ninety days in—if you did your work all that time—you were set. Never had to worry about a job, being laid off. So most guys, when they hit that point, especially from the coal mines or the timber industry up north, or out east, where a lot of things fluctuate so much, different jobs. They loved that where you get into a job where they knew they'd have a job as long as they wanted to work.

DC: Yeah, yeah. A sense of security was a big thing.

AW: Yeah.

DC: Uh, let's see. I have a bunch of things to follow up on. Do you know when the union came to Pontiac Motor?

AW: Uh, back in the '30s. '37 they had that big strike up at Flint. They had that. And then my brother got involved in that a little bit.

DC: He did?

AW: Yeah.

DC: What did he do there?

AW: Well, he knew a couple of guys, they went along with, protesting and picketing. And I mean, he wasn't involved in nothing else, but this other guy, I call him my uncle, but he wasn't—actually he was my brother-in-law's dad. Elmer Johnson. He had been an old machine gunner from the First World War in the American Army, you know. A tough old boy. And he was in a Flying Squadron—I think I told you before about that. Well he was in this Flying Squadron, and he told me a lot of stories. In fact, he come over to our house one time, and they were having that big trouble down at Ford's. They had machine gunned some people down at Ford's, down there, and killed people down there. And this Harry Bennett, the old yahoo, you know—I've heard stories about this guy all my life, you know. Anyway, he [Johnson] come to the door to tell my Dad, and he says to my Dad," he says, "Andrew, I want to borrow your rifle." And my Dad had an old Army Springfield bolt-action rifle. And he says, "Uh, what do you want to do with it?" And he says, "I'd just as soon you not know. You don't know nothing about it." So he took the rifle, and he was gone. And a few days later he come back, he says, "Andrew, I'm going to get you another rifle. That one we got here is at the bottom of the Detroit River." And he says, my Dad says, "[??]." And he says, "Well, we were going down to get Harry Bennett. We sat outside his house. We had a spot set up. We sat outside his house, but he never come out. But his chief lieutenant did. His top lieutenant come out. And he walked out the door, and stood there, to say good-bye, to Harry Bennett's wife." He says, "I nailed him right through the head."

DC: Is that right?

AW: Yeah. You see, things were vicious back then. They were killing people. And this is what they found out. You strike back and strike hard, they'd back off. See, even Hoffa found that out, and that's why Hoffa got tied up in the mob, because these company goon squads—they'd hire these goon squads come in and beat the guys up, and cripple them up and all. And Elmer was in the Flying Squadron. And they had a group out of Pontiac. It was kind of a top-secret deal that the UAW had.

DC: It was in the late '30s then.

AW: Yeah.

DC: Mid-‘30s.

AW: This was about ’39.

DC: Yeah, OK.

AW: They were going down to Ford’s. They had trouble at Ford’s. They had a little trouble at General Motors, but General Motors was a lot better. See, General Motors would give you principle—they would go for a union, but they would fight on the money. Ford was the other way around. Now, he would, you know, he would fight on principle and money both. He was trying to stop the union.

DC: Sure. Did any of the guys you started work with remember what it was like before the union?

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: What did they say about that?

AW: They used to say—we’d always talk about different things like that, because they’d hear stories, too, from different guys, you know. And there’s a lot of different stories. There were a lot of different people—how they had fought, and different things, and clubs.

DC: So a lot of them had actually fought in the organizing drive, it sounds like.

AW: Yeah. Yeah. See, it was mostly skilled tradesmen that set up the union to begin with.

DC: And now, that’s what I was getting at. I mean, what did they say—how did they compare their work lives before the union with their work lives after the union? Did they ever talk about that?

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: What did they say?

AW: Oh, they said that before the union, the guys, you’d be treated like a dog, you know. Not all of them, but most of the foremen, most of these guys would give you really a hard time—fire you. See, Ford’s is worse yet. Harry Bennett—he was an ex-convict. And most of his guys were—they would go—like if it was a group of Italians down there, he would hit these Italian ladies, and tell these Italian women that they had to screw him or else they would fire their husbands. Of course these Italian gals, they’d more or less panic on the deal, and they’d end up getting screwed. But then they’d panic about it, and their husbands would find out about it—they finally went—a couple of these guys got their wives, they went right to Mrs. Ford. And Mrs. Ford found out about it, and that’s when the shit hit the fan. And she went down there. She wanted Harry Bennett fired—wanted to get him out of there. And Henry had to do a lot of talking. He kept him, but

kind of on the back row, see. And he told old Harry to knock that stuff off, because his wife had found out about it, and she was a stockholder too, see. A major stockholder. And she's, you know—there was a lot of dirty things back then. I mean they needed a union. See, I fought with the union myself, a lot of times. See, because I'm the only guy that has five skilled trades classifications. And the union kind of wants to keep you in one classification. I started off repair machinist—machine repair—and that was metal work and machine operator. Tool maker. And then I ended up being a metal model maker.

DC: OK. I need to figure out more about those, but I want to follow up on those questions first. When they told you about the difference that the union made—you said before, some of them would treat you like dogs, and you needed the union.

AW: Yeah.

DC: Did they ever talk about specifically what difference it made to have a union? What were the specific differences?

AW: Well, you could go to the bathroom. Yeah. Like my Dad said, that was the biggest thing. Other guys, like down at Ford's, guys had literally crapped their pants, and pee themselves right there, because they had to keep working, because they wouldn't let them go to the bathrooms.

DC: How about with the skilled trades, like the guys . . .

AW: Well, the skilled trades weren't as bad.

DC: OK.

AW: Like the production guys. But they pushed them, though, too.

DC: How would, I mean—they were pushing before, then what did the union do to change that, with the skilled trades group?

AW: Well the skilled trades weren't as bad as the hourly—I mean regular production workers. But the skilled trades guys felt a lot of sympathy for the production workers. Because a lot of them had come from the production into the skilled trades. And also family, guys working on it. See it was family and neighbors and friends, all working over there, and they didn't like that stuff, see. That's why a lot of them skilled tradesmen were in the Flying Squadron. They'd pick out a guy, and they'd wait, and they'd ambush him. And the next thing you knew, the Company would hear he was in hospital. They wouldn't kill them. Most of the time they would just cripple them. I mean the guy—maybe he'd like to beat up people—they'd break his arm, or both his arms.

DC: Playing hardball here.

AW: Yeah, it was strictly hardball. And they had to be.

DC: Could your foreman put pressure on you, as a skilled tradesman, to work harder, faster, differently? What kind . . .

AW: They tried. Some of them tried. They didn't work very good with me.

DC: OK.

AW: Because they would come at me, and this and that, and of course—all I had to do, I usually went up and seen—one thing, that ended up being good for me, one of the guys, on the last job I had, over at engineering, my neighbor, he was head honcho down there. But I didn't realize that. I knew he lived across the street from me, when I lived at Crescent Lake over there. And—man, what was his name. I can't even think of his name right now. He died [40?] years ago. He was an engineer. [comes up with the name] He had been an Army officer in World War II, but he come back. And he was a guy—a heck of a nice guy. In fact, he's one of the guys that helped me get over to engineering from the plant.

DC: OK.

AW: And so, I worked with him over there. And anyway, a couple foremen would try to give me a hard time, and I went and talked to him. And I says, "I'm not going to be around here much longer." And he says, "What do you mean?" I says, "I'm about ready to punch a guy right in the face." And he says, "Don't do that." He says, "Not in the shop." [laughs] He says, "And make sure nobody sees you. And then deny it." You know, because he knew that some of those guys were real yahoos, you know.

DC: So did you ever meet him outside the plant?

AW: Well, a couple of guys—I run into them outside the plant, and they'd take off and they wouldn't come—they wouldn't do nothing. They were chicken. No, they thought about it inside, but when it come right down, you pin them down, they were all talk.

DC: Did you ever use the union? Did you ever have to file a grievance?

AW: Oh yeah. A lot of times.

DC: OK. So what kinds of things resulted in grievances?

AW: Ah, equalization of hours was the most of the times that I had, you know, the skilled trades. Because they worked a guy—one of the guys maybe worked a Saturday and Sunday, you know—then maybe they left me home, and I was low on hours. They're supposed to equalize hours as much as possible.

DC: Would you have the option to work overtime?

AW: Yeah, but if you turned it down, you could turn it down and let the other guy work [??].

DC: But did you generally want to work more hours?

AW: Yeah, usually I did, yeah. That's where you made your money.

DC: Sure. Yeah.

AW: I mean, you could more than double your salary by working the overtime. Like [name?], my foreman, when I worked—they only got time and a half. When I was working holidays, I'd get triple time, and I was group leader. My foreman and I had a deal set up. He belonged to the Presbyterian Church too, and he was a deacon. And I told him, I says, "Howard, you go ahead and come in that morning, get things set up. I got on group leader—I'll take care of all our records and I'll take care of the phone. Anybody asks, you're over in the plant. But give me your phone number I can get a hold of you." And so he would take off and go to church, and do different things like that. And I said—of course I [?], "they're giving you a [?], you know." And he was kind of a religious guy, but he didn't like that too much. But him and I, we'd go—him and I and [?], the three of us, we'd all go down to Camp Perry every year. We've been going for the last . . .

DC: Where's Camp Perry?

AW: Right half way between Toledo and Cleveland, right on Lake Erie. It was Admiral Perry's base in 1812. It's a National Guard base, but—and the National Rifle Association has their big shoots down there. In June, July, and August, they lease the whole park—whole camp—and we have all our international Army guys come in, the Navy, Coast Guard, and they have the Michigan State Police, Sheriff Departments, and top—all these different shooters come in, and a lot of civilian shooters.

DC: So when you guys would go down there—I'm trying to remember how we got off on Camp Perry . . .

AW: Oh, about my boss. Talking about my boss. Because Howard, that's when he had to work—he and I—see, we retired, and we, before then—he was a good friend. Now he's the kind of guy that, he wouldn't ever cuss anything out. He was, like I could say, religious. And in fact I had one engineer come up to Howard, he says, "That Andy, I want to get him fired, or reprimanded. He called me a dumb asshole." And Howard looked at him: "He did?" He says, "You got anything to say about it? Have you got anything to say about that?" And he says, "Well I think Andy's right." [laughs] So, he didn't call him one, but he says, you know—because this guy give us trouble. In fact, one of the big shots upstairs come down, [Irwin Thompson?], and told me, and asked me about it, and I told him that the guy was going to get me fired. And he says, "Oh he is, is he?" He says, "Don't you say anymore." I says, "If I says this job is wrong, the way he wanted to do it, and here's the way I showed him. That's the way he was supposed to do it." That's back when we were building the 1971 Pontiac station wagon prototypes, and

he had had—we had built a new frame for it. Then we built the body. But we had to change all the mounting holes—the body mounting holes that fasten to the frame. And I found out later what happened. They had had a change in the body—in the frame print. But not the body print. So the holes were two inches off on the [?], see. I tried to tell this guy he was wrong. He says, "Uh, I'm an engineer. I know more about this than you do." I says, "Well you're a dumb son of a bitch too. And he was going to get me fired. Well, two days later he walked out with his stuff. They fired him. But I come to find out, though, really what it was. It was just two different cliques in salary, and he happened to be in the wrong one, see. And they were looking for an excuse to get rid of him. They found it by using—they used me. They told me, said, "We want to use you to get rid of this SOB." He says, "We know," you know, "he's costing us money," he says. I says, "Good! Put my name right down there." I'll sign anything.

DC: Had that guy really screwed up, though? Was he the one responsible for . . .

AW: Yeah. I tried to help him out.

DC: Right. You told him.

AW: Yeah, remember Louis [Seaton?]. He was Assistant for Labor Relations. In fact there's a story about Walter Reuther in that book there. They had a big meeting one time, of all the international agreements, and Walter Reuther and Louis [Seaton?] went over to sit in a corner, and they're waving their hands around and talking, and a guy I worked with, John [Seaton?], his son, was one of my engineers over there. And John just laughed. He says, "Those guys are saying that they're fighting over there; they're talking about fishing." Up at Black Lake, who had the biggest fish, you know? But anyway, back to John Seaton, see, was one of the guys, he gave me his unlisted phone number down in Bloomfield Hills. I would call him at midnight sometimes, when I was on second shift. I says, "We got a problem. Get down here John." And he would be right down there within twenty minutes, and we'd do some changes. Like we come out with the new Grand Prix—was it '68? '69. Front shock mountings. We built them just according to the prints. But when we did, the shock would hit the control arm. Well that's no good, you know. And I told him, I says, I got in there and showed it to him. What we did, we built up a prototype on a plate first, surface plate—like the shocks, I built—left the coils springs on the shocks I build, and took all the fluid out of them, so they, you know, they worked, but we could use them to get our travel and check that stuff out. That was one of my jobs. We checked everything out before we built it. Because you got to catch it before it gets on the line. Once it gets on the line, you're screwed. Well, anyway, I showed him that thing. He says, "Well, oh, good grief. What can we do?" I says, "It's simple! All we got to do, move it ahead four hundred thousandths. The top mounting bracket. I'll show you." So I called them all over, and we welded a bracket over there, and we had clearance. So, John just got the pencil, and he just changed the print, and he wrote it all down and he scribbled all over the prints. Then he grabs all the prints, and he says, "I'll have these prints back in the morning, first thing." So the day guy could work on it. And he says, "All new prints. So you weld them up and get them all set." But, just the way—and see, they had this suggestion plan, but I wasn't eligible for it.

DC: Why is that?

AW: Because my classification over there in engineering. See . . .

DC: Was this a later stage in your career?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AW: The last, the last, the last fifteen years.

DC: OK, the last fifteen years were spent where?

AW: Right in engineering.

DC: Engineering. OK. All right. So you weren't allowed to make suggestions from Engineering.

AW: Oh, I'd make suggestions, but I wouldn't get no awards. I wasn't eligible for $10,000. See, what they would do, like John Seaton says, "I'll buy you a cup of coffee and a doughnut." John DeLorean would do the same thing. They'd go over and buy me—and I was satisfied with a cup of coffee and a doughnut, you know. At least they knew what you're doing, you know. I was right in the middle of that stuff, see.

DC: It sounds like you had a lot of expertise. You were able to solve these problems.

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: Did you—I mean, did you have engineers working with you?

AW: Yeah.

DC: What was the relationship between you and the engineers?

AW: Well, when we first started out, we had one engineer for about twelve to fourteen guys. When I left—that's when they closed Plant 8 down, and Assembly and everything else—and they had all those salary guys, I had three engineers watching me work.

DC: Oh really.

AW: Well, three guys watching me work—one engineer and two other guys. They'd get in the way a lot of times. I worked on the—like over there, towards the end—I worked on the HUD. You ever see that HUD deal—Heads Up Display. It's the holograms they project on the windshield. They developed it—Hughes Aircraft developed it for the Air Force,

because it automatically loads your guns and rockets, like my brother told me a lot of that stuff, in the Air Force. But these guys at Hughes Aircraft developed it for the Army. They cost over a million dollars apiece for the Army ones, but we developed them—got them down to about twenty-five bucks apiece. We wanted to put them—we had them in the cars—we put them first in the Oldsmobile Cutlass. Then we put them in the Grand Prix. I wanted to put them in all the cars. I says, "If we could put them in all the cars, we could get the cost down to about twenty-five, thirty dollars. Roger Smith wouldn't do it. Oh, he wanted to charge $500 for it. See, this is what—Roger Smith is a bean counter. And I worked with the engineers, and my thinking—in fact I took almost two years out to Oakland University and OCC. I've got—in plastic technology. I worked with one engineer, [Josh Bradden?], now he [?] with the Volkswagen, but he was a big guy, played football at Michigan State, anyway. But he was a real brain. This guy was real big, stronger than hell, and he was a brain too. But they held him back too, because his boss was a little guy, about five foot tall, that hated him because he was so big, and smart. But anyway, he—Josh sent me out to the college, taking all these plastics technology courses.

DC: And when did you take these courses?

AW: Oh, back in '71, '72, '73. And I took a—tell you what, I took a—over at Oakland University, I took a chemistry course. That was the roughest course I ever took in my life. And I told them over there, to me, all I want is carbon chemistry. Like these other—it was a bunch of young girls in there, taking it for nursing courses and stuff. I said, "I don't care about none of that stuff." I said, "The job I got, I'm a group leader. I'm going to be there till I retire, and the only thing I'm worried about is the plastic panels. We built up all our prototypes out of plastic, see. We built our Grand Prixs and our Firebirds, we built them up out of plastic, the same stuff they use for the Corvette. But we built these parts all up. It's a lot cheaper to build these prototype parts out of plastic; then we could change—if it was a change, we'd change our molds. Because we wanted it perfect, until we build the dies. Because you get to build those dies—like you build a die—like we built, say, instrument panel. The first one, it's $150,000 cost. But after that, fifty cents apiece.

DC: Oh, OK. Right, right.

AW: See, because of the cost of the machinery, see.

DC: Did the process of making those dies change over time?

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: From when you started versus when you finished?

AW: Oh yeah. We'd make engineering changes on stuff . . .

DC: But I mean, like did you use plastic, for instance, in the 1950s? Or was that something you used later?

AW: Later.

DC: Later, OK.

AW: Because we didn't have it back then, see. I wish we had—back then I had to cut and weld. And it looked like hell sometimes. We'd get our shapes, what we wanted, though.

DC: So you made your prototypes with metal, then, earlier?

AW: Yeah. The early ones, yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK. Do you remember when you switched to plastic?

AW: Uh, back in the '70s.

DC: In the '70s. OK.

AW: Yeah. We started getting it—Josh [?] pushed it. He was the guy who was the real brain on this. In fact he went to Volkswagen down there. They hired him at Volkswagen for twice the money than he was getting at Pontiac. And he walked off and left them. But he would always come back and see us a lot of times. We'd invite him to parties, because we always liked him. He was—see, a lot of our engineers were good guys—damn good guys. And I worked with a lot of them.

DC: I'm going to try to jump back into the '50s again. I know we just made a jump into the '70s, but I'm trying to keep track of how things developed here.

AW: Yeah.

DC: I'm trying to think—you mentioned—this is back to something you mentioned about the equalization of hours: Did those grievances get resolved to your satisfaction?

AW: Oh yes. Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Were there any other kinds of issues that came up?

AW: Well us in skilled trades, that was the biggest thing right there, hours and stuff. Or different guys would want a different job or something. But a lot of times—say, not me, but a guy complained about me having this job, and he was wanting a grievances—he was going to do this, and he was going to do that. Well the company and the union got together, and they—of course the committeeman just shook his head, and the foreman, they got the guy inside and just told him—he says, "we told him that he doesn't have the ability." That's why he—he says, "Hey, Andy over there, he's got college time; he's got—and he's pretty sharp. In fact," he says, "he's doing engineers' work." I was doing

actually engineers' work. [?] layout stuff. And they were—because we were short of engineers at the time.

DC: In the 1950s, when you were first starting out and all, was there any squabbling amongst you guys about who would do which job and all?

AW: Oh, a little bit.

DC: A little, yeah.

AW: But myself, I didn't –I'd do anything. It didn't bother me none. Dirty job, or into the press room. In fact, I preferred moving around, because I hated to be at one spot where I was pinned down on a bench. You know, some guys loved that. They'd sit at the bench and work all day building little molds and stuff like that.

DC: So some guys wanted to stay put?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AW: But I preferred to fluctuate around. In fact, it was a steady joke over there, if they needed parts, they always asked me because I usually knew where they were.

DC: Because you had been so many different places.

AW: They were looking for a 400 engine. Oh, he says, we need a 400 engine for this car. They had quit building them. And he says, "W can't find none." And I says, "I know there's three of them sitting down in back of the basement window in the corner." Some guy had stuck them back there, and kind of hid them out, you know. Then I says—so I took the boss down there, and boy they were tickled. And I says, "Somebody stuck them there and just hid them out." And he says, "Well, that's good," he says, "I'm taking all three of them up and putting them right by my office. One we need right now, and two more we'll have up there." So they took them up, and this guy that had it was kind of perturbed about it, but I says, "Hey they found out about it. They went down there." You know, and this is what—I worked over there and I was pretty good on a lot of stuff—could spot stuff and knew where things were at, you know. And they—the bosses liked that. He come over—when they were looking for something, they'd come over and see me.

DC: OK, yeah.

AW: And there was a joke about it: "Andy? Where's Andy? He's here someplace." [laughs] Get on the P.A. system and go: "See Andy's just like horseshit—all over the place."

DC: [laughs] I asked you earlier, you know, about when you started out, in the '50s, what you liked most about the job. You said 'the guys.' You talked about people from all over the world really.

AW: Yeah.

DC: What did you like least about the job? Or was there anything that bothered you about that job?

AW: Well, once in awhile a salary guy, like one of the bosses like I told you about—a couple of these characters. The dirt, the grease, and the slime, that didn't bother us none. They furnished us coveralls, and we just took off the coveralls, and if you got too bad, they even had showers, you know. So it was no problem there, you know. Hell, dirt will wash off. We're not worried about that. Some guys didn't like it very much, but it never bothered me none. It was actually a good life. And we had a good place there. And it's a shame—like we can think it's a hell of a shame that a lot of these young people come up today and ain't got a chance to have the same thing, the chance I did. Because these jobs are gone. It's like, right now, General Motors is dickering on the plant, that new plant in Korea. You wait and see. They're building—there's two Chinese plants, two of them over in China, building Buicks. Our four-cylinder engine plant went to China. I had a chance, I could have worked with that. Because my engineer I worked with, he wanted me to go with him to help set that plant up. They go over there to China, in a cornfield, that was about, it must have been about five miles square, thousands of acres. And then all they had was a 110 power line in there. The Chinese went in and built a dam, right by that river right by there, in order to get power to put a new plant right there—they're building these Buick plants. But I says, "Hey, no, I'm not going to go over there, not in China." Because I had friends who fought in Korea, you know, and I says, "You get over with those Chinese, you're dealing with different people." Because—uh, what was his name? I'm trying to think. He's a Chinese engineer. He come over to this country when he was only less than a year old. But he didn't like the Japanese because his Dad was executed right on Singapore by the Japanese when they lined up all those Chinese and killed all those Chinese officers—his Dad was an officer, Army officer. I'm trying to think of his name. But anyway, he's one of the guys—he went over to Korea when they set up that there plant—they were building the LeMans. He said they had three guys that had signs protesting the wages, because they'd found out—they even asked, uh, asked him about it, about the wages. And he told them: "I ain't going to keep no secrets. You know if this job is paying $10 an hour over in the United States—well actually, more than that—and these guys are making five cents an hour." See, skilled trades got ten cents an hour, and the production guys got five cents an hour. This is why they wanted to go over there.

DC: Sure.

AW: But see, I'm good friends with a lot of engineers, and one of my buddies went down there to the Tech Center—they did a cost analysis there, last year. And they did the cost on the car, of labor, is less today than it was in 1974.

DC: Is that as a proportion of the cost of the vehicle?

AW: Yeah. The labor. Just the labor. Because you got a lot more expenses—computers and stuff in a car, of course, you know, than we had back then. But the care is ten times the price as it was back then. So it's not the labor that's causing the problems. This is why a lot of companies are having second thoughts on a lot of this stuff. Because Americans are dependable. They like to—what I started to say, over in Korea, these guys were protesting had signs, three of them, and the Army over there has control of security. No plant security; the Army has control. This Army lieutenant come in with about ten guys, they grabbed these three guys, took them outside, stood them against the wall and shot them. He says, "I stood there and watched them. I couldn't believe it."

DC: When was this now?

AW: Because they were protesting . . .

DC: I know why, but when was it?

AW: When was it?

DC: Yeah.

AW: When they were setting up the LeMans plant over in Korea. That was—I'm trying to remember the date when they built that Pontiac LeMans.

DC: I can look that up.

AW: Yeah, look it up, when they brought it over. But these guys. That's what—this is what—this is why we wanted a union. [laughs]

DC: Yeah, that's a pretty graphic example.

AW: Yeah, because over there, these guys—I was saying, my nephew went to Mexico—he works for the outfit that puts the sun roofs in, on cars. Well he went down to Mexico, and they shipped him, they paid him—they paid for his room, and they paid for everything, you know. But he had to train guys down there. They told him, "Don't you tell those guys what you make." See? Because we would make so much more, if these Mexicans knew what the heck we were making, and what they're working for, which I think is real wrong. And I think that Mexican guy ought to make the same money our guys are, if they want to take the job down there. Then they wouldn't be so fast about moving those jobs.

DC: You're right about that.

AW: And this is what the union is going to have to work on. [?] keeping these people, telling them, "Hey, you're getting five cents an hour." Now at General Motors, has doubled the wages for the Chinese. They took them from five cents an hour to ten cents an hour for production, and from ten cents to twenty cents for skilled tradesmen—that's for carpenters, electricians, and die makers. And the Chinese government had a fit. They didn't want that. They said it caused inflation. He says, "No, we're going to do it to keep our help and keep the best help." They were literally fighting to get jobs, to get in there. And I'll tell you one thing, don't ever kid yourself about the Chinese. They are highly intelligent people—really smart. You get into some of—[coughs]—because I worked with some of those engineers we had over there with the Chinese, and they were actually—their Intelligence Quotas are way above ours. And like, the poor black guy—he's on the bottom. And we're in the middle there, and the Chinese are up in the top, and the Orientals. Their brain development is . . .

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

AW: . . . like, I started to say about John DeLorean. I worked with John one time on a [tri-power] setups, on our adjustments. We were getting it all set—and this guy was a hands-on engineer. He liked to get right in there. He'd have a—he always dressed in a lavender shirt, and a purple sport coat, you know. He was really a good dresser. I used to kid him all the time, I always used to kid about, "I wish I had the guts to wear that." And he says, "Do it!" But anyway, we were working this one day on this tri-power setup, and he had his sport coat off, and he had his shirtsleeves up to his elbow, and he's right in there. And I says, "Take your shirt off; I'll give you a shop coat." He says, "Nah, that's all right." So he's working there, and this is on a Sunday, I think it was—we was working on a Sunday. And the shop committeeman come by. There was nobody in the place, hardly. And he says, "What's going on here? I warned you before about that John. I'm going to write you up." I looked at him and said, "Who in the hell are you?" He says, "Well I'm the shop committeeman." I says—I didn't know it. I'd never seen him: "The only time we hear from you guys is election time." Of course I didn't make a very big hit either. And he says, "Well, I'm going to write you up." And I says, "Who called you?" He says, "Nobody." I says, "Well, you keep right on moving."

DC: So he was complaining that DeLorean was doing your work?

AW: Yeah. And I says, "There's one guy working and one guy bossing." And I says, "John"—I hand him a pair of pliers, "Get your ass back to work." Then I'm sitting there, leaning on the car, I says, "I've got too good a deal going here. Don't screw me up."

DC: So you were overseeing John DeLorean.

AW: Yeah. [laughs]

DC: [laughs]

AW: Actually, technically, he knew what he wanted, see, and he could do it twice as fast by getting in there. There was another guy too, and he developed the automatic air I worked with—oh, Bill [??]. He was the same way. [??] This guy looked like Charles DeGaulle, you know. And he'd be underneath there, and I'd—"Hey, be my guest! You go right in there." One guy working and one guy bossing, you know. And I'm leaning there watching them.

DC: It sounds like you had a pretty good working relationship with these engineers, anyway.

AW: Oh yeah. Talked to them just like we're talking to you.

DC: Yeah, right.

AW: I tell you, once you get some of your higher-ups, just like Johnny Seaton—his dad is one of the top guys—he gave me his unlisted phone number so I could get a hold of him if anything come up. Because I covered his butt. Like this other guy I told you about who got fired, I tried to cover him, and he tells me—he was trying to get me fired, see. That's why I used to work with these engineers—I would find things—that was my job. I would find things that would come up—problems. We had to straighten them out, before they got into the—because you wouldn't dare let them go into production, because they'd never work

DC: It sounds to me like a big theme was respect—there were people who respected your knowledge and abilities, and people who didn't.

AW: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Does that sound right?

AW: Yeah. I knew it—there was one engineer who said, "Boy, you're really sharp." And I says, "Well yeah. Just one little thing." And I says, "You know everything. You're an engineer and you've got all the whole thing. All I know is this little part right here. This is my whole life right here." And he says, "Well, yeah, it would be." A lot of these guys used to come down there, they'd request that I work with them on all these jobs—different ones. Because I could cover for them and do things, and we'd help one another out.

DC: But it sounds like you had a wide variety of expertise.

AW: Oh yeah. Because every time I got a car, I got a shop manual. Those come from the Tech Center, and they're fairly expensive, around about 40 bucks apiece. Well I'd talk to these engineers, I'd say, "I need a shop manual." They went, "OK." And in a few days, on my desk at my bench there would be a shop manual.

DC: OK. Now was it normal to get a shop manual?

AW: No.

DC: OK. All right.

AW: The only ones who got it was the mechanics and the guys that had jobs that were into it. That's how they got it—they beat it. They said, "Well Andy's working on a car, and he needs it for his job." Of course I'd take it home and give it to my boy—my oldest son that's deaf, and he's an electrical motor truck repair [man] over at Truck and Coach.

DC: Right now he does?

AW: Yeah.

DC: Uh huh. OK.

AW: But he had his first car when he was 9 years old. One of the engineers I worked with give him a Nash Rambler. It didn't run. It quit running, so he says, "Hey, you want a car?" I says, "Why not?" That's why I just got a wrecker to haul it home. He got it running. He got the whole thing chugging along, you know. It had over 100,000 miles on it.

DC: When was your oldest son born?

AW: He was born, uh, it's kind of a joke, because he was born—we were married in '51, and he was born in '52, exactly ten and a half months after we had been married.

DC: Oh, OK.

AW: And all the three kids were born within three years. I always tell them, it took us that long to figure out what was causing it!

DC: Was your oldest son born deaf?

AW: Yeah.

DC: He was, OK.

AW: See, I've got a bad ear, my left ear is dead. It's not—my ear is good. My ears are perfect. It's just the nerve. They call it congenital—a little tiny nerve that's not even a half inch long. It runs from your ear drum to your brain. It's never been developed. And I have a half sister—one of my brother's—first family—Angeline—she's deaf the same way, both ears.

DC: Oh, OK.

AW: My Irish grandmother was hard of hearing. And so I think it's just something kind of follows her gene in the family.

DC: What was it like raising a deaf child?

AW: To him, pretty good. He was—I'd be working on a car, he'd be out there with me, his head under a car. I had to pull a box up so he could stand on it, so he could watch what I was doing. And I would bring these books home—shop manuals and stuff I would bring home from work. He would read those like other kids read funny books. I had a brother-in-law that worked on the Chrysler missile thing, and he worked at the Army, on the missile things. Now he would sit there and draw up sketches of these missiles and rockets that they would build, you know. And when he went to school—he started school in the second grade—they had all these deaf kids take a project to draw something. So he sits there, and draws up this missile with everything—all the fins, and all the [laughs]. And the teachers, oh, they were calling the principal. They were amazed that here's this *deaf* kid that is drawing up rockets that most of them didn't know what it was about.

DC: What school did he go to?

AW: He went to about 5 different schools. He finally finished down to Lahser, down at Lahser High School. See they had different classes in Oakland County they set up for deaf kids.

DC: Were they moved from school to school?

AW: Yeah. Different classes. And when they were further up, and—and anytime I wanted something like these here, I had no trouble getting it. But if they wanted something—they wanted government work done—like we had—my boss got after me for doing—I used to do government work for cars. I'd get a little stock. And so I'd build up—fix snowmobile parts, or motorcycle parts, or gun parts, or anything. And this one time, this Ralph [??], he was—I went to school with him. We went from junior high school and high school. Well he ended up being superintendent down there in engineering. He come in one day and had these snowmobile skis. I says-and this other guy had given me a hard time about doing government work, see. And I got an idea. I says, "Hey Ralph, what do you got there?" He says, "Oh, I've got some skis here." I says, "Let me have them. I'll take care of them." I says, "I get a little free time once in awhile in between jobs. I can knock it off for you." He says, "Good." So I took them back. Of course I made sure this guy seen what I was doing—[?] working on snowmobile skis. He come back there and he says, "I'm going to take those and throw them right in the scrap tub." And I says, "Go ahead. Be my guest." And he says—he looks at me kind of funny, he says, "What do you mean?" I says, "Go ahead, be my guest and do it." I says, "I tell you what, you'll find your ass in the scrap tub alongside of them." And he says, "What do you mean?" I says, "That's my buddy Ralph's skis." Ralph was his boss.

DC: OK, yeah.

AW: And then he says, "Oh." He took off out of there, and every time he'd just come out and say something about what I'm working on, I says, "I'm doing a little job for Ralph." He'd back off. He wouldn't say no more.

DC: Like a force field.

AW: You know, you gotta use a little psychology on them, you know. Because in between jobs, we'd have free time. Some guys would go read books or papers; I'd be working on something down there.

DC: So there were some down times when there wasn't some emergency to attend to?

AW: Yeah. In between jobs, we're waiting.

DC: This is when you're waiting for jobs to break down or whatever?

AW: Yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK. Let's see. I've got all these other questions. You know, how steady was your work during the 1950s. Say, you got out of your trade school in '52 and went in—I've talked to some workers who got laid off in '54, got laid off in '58, and the economy . . .

AW: Well, see, I was working over in the Fisher Body Plant, part of Pontiac Motors . . .

DC: As of when? Pontiac Motors and Fisher Body.

AW: It's all one unit.

DC: Yeah, got you.

AW: But I was working on that section over there, part of their press room over there. I was assigned over there.

DC: And when was that?

AW: That was back in '57.

DC: '57, OK.

AW: And they shut the press room down.

DC: OK.

AW: They wanted me to go to Marion, Indiana or Mansfield, Ohio. I could have had my choice. They wanted to make me a foreman. To send me to one of those plants.

DC: That was one of those times they wanted to make you salary.

AW: Yeah, and they said, "We want to make you—a foreman's job down there." Says, "You get along good with the people," and he says, "You'll make a good foreman." I said, "I get along good with the men, but the higher-ups are the ones I have trouble with." But then my wife didn't want no part of that, though. Because her family was all around here. And so my neighbor, who lived across the street from me, Ed [?], he was telling me that they were hiring over in engineering. And I went over and talked to him. I says, "Hey, they're hiring over there?" I says, "I'm going to see about getting a job." He says, "Come on over." So I went over there on a Thursday. I knew they were getting laid off Friday. I went over to talk to him, and when I was over there, Ed [?] come around the corner and the guy says, "Well, we'll check you out and see how you are." And Ed went over there, I seen him, and I waved to him, and he come into the office there, and he's talking. He says, "Hi Brown." Henry Brown was his name. He was a foreman over in the Repair Shop there. "Old Brownie" we called him. Anyway, old Ed [?] come in, he seen me, he says, "Oh, I see you're over here." He says, "Brownie, you hire him yet?" He says, "Well, we're thinking about it." He says, "Well hire him. He's a good man." And I was supposed to wait a couple weeks while they checked me all out. And Brownie says, "You start Monday."

DC: This is in '57 then, just when you were about to be laid off.

AW: Yeah. I got laid off on a Friday, and went to work on Monday.

DC: OK. In Engineering at that point.

AW: Yeah. See they transferred all our time, and our seniority, and everything else over there.

DC: So when did you get switched to the press room.

AW: When I started out, I was in the press room there.

DC: All right. You started out. OK.

AW: Yeah. I was working there on that section. There was two different parts. It's all the same plant. But it was actually a different section and all.

DC: OK, there we go. I'm still learning all these different divisions.

AW: But actually, they would—when they shut down, see, they brought a bunch of us guys from over in Fisher Body. In fact, when I went over there, they said, "Is there any more guys over there?" And I says, "Yeah! There's a bunch of them there." So I—there was

four other guys—I made some phone calls, and they had me call right from the shop there, and they come over and went to work there too.

DC: So was that the first time that you were facing layoffs?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AW: In '57. Actually, there was a layoff, but I would be actually—transferred my job. I was supposed to go right down to Marion, Indiana.

DC: Because of your seniority you were able to do that? Oh, they wanted you to be the foreman.

AW: Yeah. They wanted me to be a foreman down there, see. Because I had been a group leader—like a group leader.

DC: When did you become a group leader?

AW: Over at Fisher Body, I was a group leader for awhile. Then when I went to engineering, I took over the job when one of the other guys retired, about three or four years later. I had always been leading the job.

DC: Whether you were called "group leader" or not?

AW: Yeah. The big boss would hand me a job and says, "You go take care of it."

DC: When did you officially become group leader?

AW: Oh, let's see, about 1980.

DC: Oh, OK. I'm missing something then. I thought you became a group leader in the 1950s.

AW: Oh no, no, no.

DC: No, OK.

AW: See, they had to go by—technically, I was—technically I was group leader. Officially, I wasn't until 1980 when the older guys retired. I had to wait until somebody dies or retires over there, see.

DC: So when you started out, you were the de facto group leader. You were actually doing the leading.

AW: Yeah.

DC: But you weren't officially a group leader.

AW: In fact, when I become a group leader, I was actually doing engineers' work.

DC: OK, right.

AW: Because engineers would—they was short of engineers.

DC: So you were always a step above your title?

AW: Yeah. The foreman would come down and say, "Take care of it." I'd go take care of it.

DC: All right. So in '57, then, you went over to engineering. And tell me what that was like. You got laid off Friday, went to work Monday. What was your new job like?

AW: Well, the new job was into more prototype stuff, like—before I was in the big stuff, like roof dies and quarter panels, and repairing big presses. And that's when I told—when I went in there, they said, "You're supposed to be one of the top machinists over there." I says, "Yeah." He says, "Well, I got a job here on the Bridgeport." I says, "What's a Bridgeport?" He says, "Well this machine right there." And here's a little tiny thing. I says, "Hell, that's nothing but a glorified drill press." It's just—you know, you go up and down. But what it is, you get the real fine, little things.

DC: OK. Finely tuned.

AW: Yeah. Fine-tuned stuff. You get the little tiny things, you know. So I looked at him, I talked to him, I told him, I says, "Well, this machine isn't as big as my cutter I had on my [laughs] my big [planer?]."

DC: How was your transition to the new job?

AW: Oh, it took me about fifteen minutes.

DC: [laughs] Oh, OK. Not too long.

AW: No. Uh uh.

DC: So what about the work environment? How did it compare to the previous work environment?

AW: It was a lot cleaner. A lot cleaner job. See, we didn't have the grease and stuff around, much like—unless you got into a tear-down job. Like we worked on cars we'd send out to the proving grounds. We'd bring a car in from the proving grounds; they'd want a frame change. Frame change, change the engine. And I'd be over there working with the mechanics. Because all the frame part works—and there'd be work in the body—I did.

And the mechanics. We'd change—there was kind of a—we had it set up, because we got so we could bring a car in—when I worked second shift—I had to go back on second shift over there, see, when I went in '57.

DC: Is that because you lost some seniority?

AW: Yeah. Well, for shift preference. Also, we got into a place where a lot of older guys were, with a lot of time, see. You had to go back to nearly—but anyway I got over there and so I was on second shift, which didn't bother me none. I preferred the second shift, because there were a lot of younger guys on the second shift, you know. All the old-timers wanted days, you know. No, we got a lot of work done right there. And like I say, working with John DeLorean, and we did . . .

DC: Did you start off, though—I mean I'm talking about when you first started out—when did you start working with John DeLorean?

AW: Uh, about two years later.

DC: About two years later. OK. So '59, or so.

AW: No, no. '58. Because we started working on [tri-power?] set-ups.

DC: OK, so you started working with him pretty early on.

AW: Yeah. Oh yeah. I was only in there a few months. And I could do the work. I could do anything over there, and he come in one night, and he wanted somebody that was pretty good to make parts up for him, and work with him on the cars. And so the boss says, "Why hell, Andy's pretty good. He'll take care of it for you." So I went over there and I talked myself right into it. Hell, I worked with him all the time then.

DC: Was that still in the engineering department?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK. It was just a different . . .

AW: Well, we would go over into the garage, next door in the garage.

DC: Oh, OK.

AW: See, that's where we had the cars. We'd jack them up on the hoist, which—I worked over there lot. Most see, a lot of our guys didn't want to go over there. They wanted to work on the bench and sit there in one spot. Where I like—like I say, I liked to move around.

DC: So you liked the freedom?

AW: Yeah. I always said, "It's hard to hit a moving target." I kept moving all the time, you know. That's how I met John DeLorean right there. And he was a hell of a nice guy.

DC: When you were working on these prototypes and all, how far in advance were you working? When were those models scheduled to come out?

AW: Sometimes a year, year and a half. Sometimes it would be a week.

DC: A week?

AW: Yeah. What would happen sometimes, something would—a problem would turn up.

DC: Oh, OK.

AW: Like we had a problem turn up in 1966 with the air conditioner compressor vibrating. What had happened, they had changed the design on the belts. They took the back bracket off. They didn't have no back bracket on the compressor. And see, at sixty miles per hour—lower it was pretty good, and higher it was pretty good. But at sixty, that thing would start vibrating, build up the vibrations with the fan belt, and [?]. And so they come up to me and asked me—they brought a motor in on a stand. They got this, he says, "We want something. Figure out something that we can beef that up. Because it's got to be done," and fixed, you know. Because they were building cars over in the plant right now.

DC: The model was running right at that moment?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK. So how did you feel, with that task?

AW: Oh I'll have it by 3:00 tomorrow morning. Because I was working second shift, and I says—the engineer says, "Good." So I got there in the morning, and the engine was gone. And I says—and I went up to the foreman, I says, "What the hell's going on?" I says, "That engine I was working on is gone." Of course I made a nice little bracket. I come up with kind of an odd shape, come up there. And I found out you got to use a—you file that nice, make all nice radiuses on it, and I got a can of black spray paint—painted it, so it looked nice and professional. Looks did 90 per cent of the job on this. And so I had it all set up, and of course, I come up and it was gone. And I says—I went up to see my boss, "Hey that thing I was working on is gone. Where the hell is it at?" "Jesus, I don't know," he says. "They wanted that." So he went and made a phone call. He phoned upstairs and talked to me. The guy says, "Well hell, they got that over in the plant. They took that part and took the whole thing over to the plant, and the tool room over there is setting up dies. They're building parts right now to stamp them out."

DC: So it was already in production.

AW: Yeah. He says, "They'll be tonight. By tonight," he says, "they'll be stamping parts out." Then he's got to send parts to all the dealers, for all these cars.

DC: Oh, so they can go back and put them in, after the fact.

AW: Yeah, they had to. And also, right on the line. They'll put them in right on the line. And the rest of them will be put right on the line.

DC: Did you think the job was done?

AW: I knew it was about done, but I wasn't sure if they OK'd or not.

DC: Oh, OK. I see. All right.

AW: See, and I—they said, "Do what you think is best." So that's all it was, was this thing was—right under the manifold there was an extra tab right there with a threaded hole. So I just come over, and make a weird-shaped bracket. I would cut first—make it out of paper. A pair of sheets of paper, make it out of paper. Fold it. Then I'd make the bracket the same way, with the slot on it so that the screw—you could adjust your belt, the thing there. So they just took and—they had it right there, and they took it over to the plant. They made the parts [?]. I guess the engineer took the parts, told them in the drawing room, "Make a print off that print. I want it right away. We've got to have it." They built it, and they built the parts. That's what a lot of my work was—was work from the plant, they run into problems.

DC: So that was the emergency part of the work.

AW: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. And then you also had the work where you were trying to refine models [?] up and down the line.

AW: Yeah. Emergencies come first though.

DC: Sure.

AW: You know, when you got an assembly line running, with all those bodies out there, you want that done—the sooner they can catch it, the cheaper it is. We get the parts made, see. We make that little bracket up and put it on that, and hell, that solved the problem.

DC: What was your sense of the company's concern about quality in those years? I'm talking about in the '50s and in . . .

AW: Well they tried to make it cheaper all the time. There was always some engineers trying to make it cheaper. And this is what I got into arguments with those guys up and down,

especially Chevy. We could take a Pontiac, we would put gates, belts, fan belts, gates, hoses, they would last three times as long on Pontiac as they would Chevy.

DC: And why was that?

AW: Because it was five cents difference.

DC: Really.

AW: And they'd save a nickel, and I says, "That's why people buy Pontiacs." I says, "We can take a Pontiac, the same car, and we put another $50 into it, and sell it for $500 more. Who's the dumbest?" See, this is what—these Chevy engineers were always trying to cut a penny out here, a penny out there.

DC: Did you work with both Chevy and Pontiac engineers?

AW: Yeah.

DC: You did? You were turning out parts for both model lines?

AW: Oh yeah. And I remember, I had my '91 Caprice. I worked group leader on that '91 Caprice, and I worked with those guys. I was cutting them up one side and down the other. They says, "Why do you hate Chevrolet so much?" I said, "I don't hate Chevy," I says. "My first car was a Chevy." My '38 Chevy, was my Mother's car, was my first car—my own personal car. And I says, "In fact I want to"—we was building this '91 right here—"I want to get one." Says, "You really want one?" I says, "Yeah." He says, "We'll get you one. We'll get you the first one." So I got the first '91 Caprice off, and built up, and I got it, and I took it home, and the guys all said, "Well gee"—see I got it in '90, because they come out early that year. They was still building '90s yet, but I got my '91 in '90. In fact, one guy says, "What did you get a police car for?" It was a dark blue, like the Pontiac police cars. I says, "Hey, I got the first one! Pontiac Police Department copied off me!"

DC: [laughs]

AW: Anyway, this is what—talk about cost. It cost—my '91 Caprice, it cost $1250 to build that car. Where it cost, a Bonneville SE, they cost $850. And the Bonneville SE sells for almost $2000 more. This is why they pushed the front-wheel drives. Because it's cheaper to construct a front-wheel drive than it is a rear drive.

DC: Hmm. OK.

AW: And, like I say, I knew a bunch of these State Police guys from Camp Perry, and they took, and they'd kind of keep it hidden, but they had these 19—what year was that now?—'96 or '97, they wanted to come out with this Chevy Lumina police cars. They built them up, black and white, with the fancy lights. And a twin-turbo engine we put

into it, so it would really wind up and move—130. Well, so they built these police cars, about eight of them. They took them out to the proving grounds. And a couple of friends of mine were the state troopers, they went out there to test them. Well the one guy, he got into them, he says, "We don't want these damn things." He says, "Well that's what we're building, and we wanted a push." He says, "OK, I'll try it out." So he went out and he wound that thing to doing over 130 in a Lumina, down the straightaway. He spiked the brakes, and he did [noise] it flipped over. He slid out of the roof. Of course he's got a helmet on and stuff like that, you know. It just tore the car all to hell. You know, especially the gumball machine on top, you know, on the roof. The engineers come up, and of course they're all panicking, and it doesn't bother him none. He says, "I thought this would happen." And he says, "This is a characteristic of four-wheel drive." That's how [Colin Mix??] got killed back in 1939 in his [?]. See his [?] was a front-wheel drive. Anyway, he told them this. He says, "Well that's a freak accident." He says, "OK, let's go again. Get another one." So to one of the engineers he said, "This time you drive, and I'll sit alongside you, and I'll tell you what to do." So he did the same thing. And they—the same thing again. Flipped upside down. But see, what happens on a front-wheel drive-a front-wheel drive for little old ladies that's not going to go above sixty-five miles per hour, you can't beat it. It's the best car on the road. In fact, up to ninety, you can control it pretty good. But you take your chances if you make a panic stop. But a front-wheel drive is a good car, real good, but it has its limitations. But this guy proved it when he smashed both those up. They took—then he took and he says, "Let's take my patrol car. I got a '91 Caprice over here that's got almost 200,000 miles on it. Let's go in that, and I'll show you what we want." He took him out in that, and he wound that thing up to about 130, spiked the brakes, spun that thing right around and come right back the same way he was going. You watch those old boys, down South, when they had the whiskey-running days down there—that's the way those guys used to drive. Well that's the way—this cop was a good driver, and he says, "This is what we want." You see it was a big squabble about when they quit building those Caprices, that the police departments, that's why they went over to Ford's. Ford's see, and they built a special pursuit car. Ford built a special pursuit car. I argued with them down there. I says, "You dumb bastards are going to make Ford rich." You know.

DC: They were producing something they don't want.

AW: Yeah, because you quit building them.

DC: So it sounds like these squabbles over engineering were something that you experienced right from the start, when you switched to engineering.

AW: Yeah, yeah. Because you always had these penny pinchers trying to cut costs. And this is what—John DeLorean didn't do that. Because I remember that I needed a cam grinder. When we went to high-lift cams, you know, they went to the special [?] engines, had the high-lift cams in them. And we had—the cam grinder we had was actually a rebuilt one from a straight-nine, the old straight-eights—didn't adjust high enough to use the high-lift cam. So we had to send them out to the job shops to get ground, and they were goofing them up. Ernie Johnson, the guy I was working with at the time, he was

really sharp on the cams and the cam grinders. Because you've got different phases for a guy to specialize in. He took all of the camshafts. Anyway, so Ernie, when he went up into the shop, he says, "Hell, I'm going to call the company up"—this special grinding company that makes all these grinders. So he called them up. We got John DeLorean down there, he says—and I told John, "Hey, Ernie called up, and this company's got three cam grinders down there right now we can have." And I says, "We need one. We can have one right now." And John says, "OK." He went in the office, made a phone call, ordered it. He called a guy from Auditor to come over there. The auditor come over there, and he says, "You know I was checking the books, and we can get it maybe next year or the year after next." And John says, "Have a check down here Monday, because I ordered it, and it's going to be here Monday. I already ordered it, and it's going to be here. I don't care where you steal the money from, who you steal it from. But I want my cam grinder." This is the kind of guy John DeLorean was. We needed something, for his job, and we got it.

DC: OK. So you felt like he was on your side . . .

AW: All the time, yeah.

DC: . . . in getting your job done, but there were these people obsessed with bean counting . . .

AW: Oh, it costs you, penny-pinching. And they say, "Well we'll delay it till . . . delay it till." You didn't do that with John. Because he'd step on toes and everything else, and that's the reason some of these guys didn't like him—Roger Smith and all those other guys. Like Roger Smith come in one day, when he seen John, and told John, he says, "You got to have a white shirt. Get rid of those lavender shirts and get a black suit on like the rest of us." He says, "You guys can look like ducks if you want to, but I don't. I'll wear what I feel like wearing. If you don't like it, you can blow it out your ass." Well, John was a big guy, and Roger Smith was just a short guy.

DC: Was John DeLorean the same way in the late '50s when you first met him?

AW: Yeah.

DC: He was?

AW: Always. A hell of a nice guy. The gals all loved him over there. We had a little gal, Minnie, was our sweeper, and she was a cute little doll, but she was just black as the ace of spades. And I remember we got a black Bonneville in there. We used to build cars up for John DeLorean for the brat pack. For Sammy Davis, and for Frank Sinatra, and all that stuff, you know. We built all these special cars up. We'd build them up for the rat pack. And we'd hand-build those cars. Now they paid for them, now. But the cars were practically hand-built. I mean, you know, there was nothing wrong with them.

DC: Professional custom-made things.

AW: Yeah. We went over them, our mechanics—they were perfect. If the engine had a little funny noise to it, we'd switch engines, or transmissions, you know. Things had to be perfect. And so these cars would be sent out there, and these guys—well this one guy complained to John, he says, "The cost!" He says, "Don't you realize the advertisement we're getting out of these?"

DC: Yeah.

AW: He says, "We got—what is it—seven or eight of these cars going out to the rat pack, and these guys are driving all the time." We built a car up for Liberace, where he ordered special leather interior—the seats were made like piano keys.

DC: Oh.

AW: And we also, for Nancy Sinatra, we built a Firebird and it had carpeting in it with real plush carpeting. And this one young mechanic we had over there, he got down—they had a space right in the carpeting—he says, "I could just dream of Nancy right now in this car." And we were kidding him about that. I says, "You probably want to stick your face in something else." He says, "I would, if I got a chance." But anyway, this is the kind of things that we worked on and all. And John would get all these contacts for us. And this is why Pontiac sales were so good. Just like Firebirds. You know when they made that movie "Smoky and the Bandit," with—well, we built 8 Firebirds up for them. We had to build them—specialty front end, because that would be an advance model for a year. So we built these 8 cars up for them. We had to rebuild for them again, because every time they'd—well that time it jumped the bridge, when it come down, all four wheels, just tore it all to hell. Those cars were all totaled when they got done. But we made that movie, though, and this is what—our sales—that's why—Firebird and Camaro are exactly the same cars, but our sales were over twice as much as what Chevy Camaros were, because it was a Firebird. And all the advertisement we got from that Smoky and the Bandit stuff. And you know, this is where these guys were sharp on these things. And Roger Smith hated that though. Just like, we built up the Fiero. I was group leader on that Fiero. I was in charge of that project. The first Fiero we had, I took a Pontiac 2000, we cut the front end off it, reversed it around. We got this square tubing, and we built tubing, and the engineer made a sketch up for me. We didn't have no blueprints. Just a sketch. He says, "I want to build this up." So I started building—I'll have the prints down by the end of the week, but you go ahead and start. So I got started and had most of it done when they got there. Then we finished it up; they built the car up. It was kind of ironic, because when we got it built up, the first one—we had one speed forward, three in reverse. Because we'd turned—we'd turned that thing around, you know, see. So we had to just change all the transmission gears around. That was a big laugh over there. They were razzing me about that.

DC: So even you made a mistake now and again, huh?

AW: Yeah. But that's the way it used to be. I enjoyed my job. I loved going to work. Until the last year.

DC: What happened then?

AW: Chevy took over.

DC: Oh, that's right. Chevy took over.

AW: And then we got all the shit jobs, and we lost all our good work, you know. And then they got these guys—and of course I was fighting with them day and night. Even on Caprice, when I built the Caprice up, you know, I was fighting with them all the time. Make the damn thing—let's build it, let's build it right. I says, "It ain't going to cost no more—design it, maybe a few cents extra." I says, "We've got something that's going to be worth it." Well the car run good. The Caprices. Like I said, the State Police Department was quite upset about them—the police departments. The '91 Caprice we built up was the best patrol car they ever had. The handling, and the work, the durability. In fact, a place in Flint, they would take them in—patrol cars that had over 100-200,00 miles, they would take and for $10,000, they would put a new engine, an all-new suspension, new wiring and stuff into that car, and give a better guarantee than we did. For the police departments. And they were doing that. Taking all these cars and bringing them in.

DC: Getting new life out of them.

AW: Yeah. They extended—double the life. In fact, down to the Sheriff's Department, I went down to the auctions down there. And these cars, you know, you couldn't buy them. Because this outfit out of Chicago was coming in and buying them all up, for taxicabs.

DC: Oh really.

AW: Yeah. They would rebuild them, the same way.

DC: I'm thinking back to when you went to second shift—when you got the job in the engineering department . . .

AW: Yeah.

DC: . . . what impact did that have on your family?

AW: Well, I had been working the second shift anyway.

DC: You had been before. Oh.

AW: Yeah. I worked there almost fourteen years, see. My wife, of course, with the kids growing up in school. She was upset about that, but that's why I'd buy a new Bonneville every year, so it kind of helped pacify it a little bit.

DC: OK. So, what was second shift, like 3:00 to 11:00? Something like that?

AW: Usually, I was working 3:30 to 12:00.

DC: 3:30 to 12:00. OK. In that range.

AW: Unless I worked overtime. Sometimes a guy would give me a phone call to go in early, and sometimes they would be on a hot job, we'd work—like I say, I remember one year back in 1967—you know the collapsible steering column that come out in '67?

DC: No, I don't.

AW: I built the first one of that. The [?]. The guy built the [?] part in that. Cut and weld all of these little pieces. They asked me if I could do it, and I says, "Sure I can do it." Then they come back, they wanted another one. I says, "Well Jesus, why didn't you say something? I could have made dies." It ended up they wanted eight more. Well they worked so good, they come up with that, because we'd build these all up on a car, and we'd put it on a car and take it out to Milford to smash them into the wall out there. See, that's what—we were a non-profit organization. Anything we built would end up against a wall. Because, see, prototype cars you can't sell. But the company made out—I talked to my buddy, and he was an engineer up there in auditing. He says, "We'd make money on that." They'd write off expenses. They'd write off, like 2-300,000 dollars.

DC: Tax deduction, huh?

AW: Yeah. It worked. "The work you guys do is all wrote off. The company's not costing money; we're actually making money." Now for total sales, they deduct that out from their total sales for engineering.

DC: When you were working second shift, were you able to see your kids very much?

AW: Oh yeah. I'd see them, you know. Except John, my boy John. I'd take him to work. I'd take him to school before when he first started, because you know, he would need special education. I'd have to take him into Pontiac. I'd drop him off at school, and I'd pick him up and go right to work then.

DC: Oh, OK. So you could pick him up from school before you had to go to work.

AW: Yeah. Then finally they got buses for them. They had buses go to him. So I missed him a lot, and you know. But every time I got a chance, we'd done things together. Like I remember I had my '57 Pontiac station wagon. I remember we used to—the first McDonald's was in Pontiac. We'd go to McDonald's for ten cent hamburgers. And I was a big spender. I'd buy everybody hamburgers and French fries and stuff, you know. And we had that nine-passenger station wagon, I could get a bunch of other kids, and we'd fill the whole car up and take all these kids in there.

DC: What else did your family do for fun in those years?

AW: Well, we'd go camping.

DC: Where did you go?

AW: I'd go up to—up across the Straits. Different campgrounds. And I'd go over to—our favorite spot was over there by Muskegon, over to the Silver Lake sands over there. We used to camp over there a lot. We camped all over the state.

DC: Did you go for weekends, or did you take a week?

AW: Take a week sometimes, a week and a half. Not so much for weekends, because by the time you get things all set up, it takes you—it's too much trouble.

DC: I agree.

AW: In fact, here last year—I had a crank-up, one of those pop-up campers you open up. I gave it to my boy because my wife—several years ago I made the biggest mistake of my life. I took my wife to Hawai'i. Took here to Hawai'i and we got one of those fancy hotels and stuff.

DC: Pop-up camper wasn't so good . . .

AW: After that, piss on that camper. She wanted to go to hotels. So I give it to my boy. He goes a lot. He goes up to Tahquamenon. See, Tahquamenon River up there in the U.P.—this is some of my old territory—like my Grandpa's old territory—we'd do a lot of fishing up there, walleyes and stuff up there on the Tahquamenon River. And my boy, he goes up to the campgrounds there, and he loves it up there. He goes—he's a cross-country skier. You haven't got any connections with Truck and Coach, have you?

DC: No, I don't.

AW: I wish you did, because I'm looking for somebody—my boy—they're taking applications for carpenter apprentices. Now he got laid off from the—of course he went to the foundry, then fourteen, then he went to the Fiero plant. Then they closed the Fiero plant down. Of course all the bosses' kids, they transferred them to the Parts warehouse. The rest of them they just dumped. He could have went down to New York, and went to work in New York. But he didn't want to do that because he has a house here, and his dogs, you know. And he didn't want to leave them, sell his house, you know, and start all over again.

DC: Did you live in that Crescent Lake house, then, all along?

AW: No, no. I had three different houses. I lived there for nineteen years.

DC: OK, from when to when?

AW: From 1951 until . . .

DC: ’70, about?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AW: ’71.

DC: Then you moved . . .

AW: I moved over to where I live at now. And I bought a house. It’s not very far away. Not even a half mile away, on Waterford there.

DC: OK. Why did you move?

AW: My wife wanted a bigger house. After the kids were almost grown up, and all she had was her little poodle, then we got this great big house.

DC: Oh, OK. So you had your apartment, then you had the Crescent Lake house, and then the . . .

AW: Yeah. I live there now. I’d like to go to a smaller place, but I got to figuring out the cost—if I had to sell my place, by the time we paid all the expenses and stuff and bought a smaller house, I wouldn’t—I just might as well keep my big house. I figure I’ll keep it until we got so bad we can’t work no more on it, then we’ll sell it and go into a condo. Or one of these senior complexes, you know.

DC: That makes sense. Yeah. Um, let’s see. You mentioned that when you started out work, there was a lot of sympathy between the skilled and the unskilled, because there were a lot of family members and friends, and all that.

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: Did that ever change over time? Did you always feel some kind of connection . . .

AW: Oh yeah. Always some kind of connection.

DC: . . . with the production line workers?

AW: Well some of those production guys were jealous, a little jealous of us guys. Like a couple of them, I told them, I says—one guy made a crack. I says, “Hey, they’re taking

applications. Go put your application in." He went down—now he's the biggest supporter we got.

DC: He got through then?

AW: He got in, yeah. A bunch of them did. I told them, I said, "Get your asses in here." I says, "They're going to hire somebody, so it might as well be you." Guys already had been working production for five or ten years. You'd come in as EIT—Employee in Training.

DC: OK. Now, who decided who got to go into the skilled trades?

AW: The Superintendent.

DC: The Superintendent did.

AW: But I usually made some recommendations.

DC: OK.

AW: I'd say, "Hey, I got a buddy of mine over there that's wanting to come in out there. He's pretty sharp." You know, they would check him out, and they'd usually hire him.

DC: So it was really a management decision to see who got into the skilled trades.

AW: Yeah. I got both my brother-in-laws in. They worked on production over there.

DC: Did the Union have any say at all in terms of who got into the skilled trades?

AW: No, but I could make recommendations.

DC: Yeah. Recommendations. OK. Yeah. I was wondering, you were mentioning that you had that sweeper, a black woman, who worked in there. Were there any black skilled trades people?

AW: No.

DC: There weren't.

AW: No.

DC: Why was that?

AW: [soft voice] Well, because they couldn't pass the intelligence test.

DC: Oh I see. OK.

AW: Yeah, because see, the ones, the black people—I've known several black—I tried to get this one buddy of mine, a black guy, to come in, and he had two years of college. He said, "No." He says, no, he's going back to college and get him a job, a good job, working with the government. See, a black guy, if you got a degree, you can get in anyplace. And see, he says, "I can get a better job than what this thing is over here." Which he did. He went down to—he'd go down to Atlanta, Georgia. That's where he went, down there. Hired in—he went in and hired in, and he got a job-he had a job before, when he went down there. He just wrote a letter.

DC: Had a job in advance?

AW: Yeah. He's a black guy, [?] engineer, got his degree—sent them a copy of his degree.

DC: Did many blacks apply for the skilled trade positions at your plant?

AW: Uh, afterwards, yeah.

DC: After when?

AW: Oh, let's see, it was about—must have been the '70s.

DC: In the '70s? OK. And did any of them get in?

AW: Yeah.

DC: They did. OK.

AW: Some of them got in. Some weren't worth a shit, and some were really good guys. And we had a couple of guys who were really good. We had several that weren't good; we got rid of them.

DC: OK, yeah.

AW: I told the boss, I says, "Hey." In fact, he says—we had two Eds there, Ed Adams and Ed Green. Ed Green was—he had been in the Air Force. He was really sharp, and he had some college time too. And I says, "He's good. Keep him." And this Ed Adams, though, I says, "He ain't worth the power to blow him to hell."

DC: They were both black?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AW: And he says, "Well, we got a job here." And I says, "I tell you what." I says, "If you give me Ed Adams it will take me three days to do that job. Give me Ed Green, we can do it in two."

DC: OK. Did he listen to you?

AW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AW: He finally got rid of Ed Adams. They sent him over to the plant to get rid of him. They put him into another job—it was this racial thing, you know. Of course, like, you know when [?] females in. Like my niece is a metal model maker. She asked me, "Uncle Andy, would you get upset if—I'm applying for that apprenticeship in that metal model making group." I told her, I says, "Debbie, go ahead. They're getting all these *black* ones in," I says, "you can jump in and get your chance." I says, "You might as well, because they're going to hire somebody." And she's sharp anyway, because—her sister, had went to GMI, graduated an engineer. Her sister, see. And they guys and gals in our family, they're all pretty sharp on a lot of that stuff.

DC: Sure.

AW: So she's a graduate metal model maker now.

DC: So she got in?

AW: Yeah.

DC: I'm assuming there weren't any women skilled trades workers when you were in there.

AW: No.

DC: So when did that start? When did women . . .

AW: Oh, I remember back, years ago, there was a woman that come over to the Union Hall, to a meeting, and she says, "We want to get women in skilled trades." Well the guys, the Union kind of laughed at her." One committeeman got up and says, "Well, what do you want to be? An electrician or something?" He says, "I tell you what, we got a job down in—tool hardener." See, sarcastic, you know. "You can fill that qualification."

DC: Do you remember when that conversation took place?

AW: Uh, what the hell was that? That was, I think that was back in the '50s.

DC: In the *'50s*? OK.

AW: Women were trying to get in in the ‘50s.

DC: So women were applying.

AW: Oh, it was ‘60s. ‘60s. Because I was over here. I was over here then.

DC: Sometime in the ‘60s, yeah. OK.

AW: And women were wanting to get in in skilled trades, and different things. Which some of them are pretty good. Because I worked on a farm when I was a kid, up on that farm. It was during the war, and we had women working right there taking things apart, taking combines—when something would break down, you’d have to tear it down and fix it right on the farm. And these gals, these farm girls—we had a Polish farm girl could grab a bale of hay and throw it higher than I could.

DC: So it sounds like what they were asking was for people like you to make a recommendation?

AW: Yeah. If you knew somebody, and it was pretty good, you know. Back then they’d try to feel them out. Now, of course, they go by all these quotas and stuff like that.

DC: They had tests to take, though, as well?

AW: Yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK. So they had the test results?

AW: You had to read and write, you know. You had to be able to fill something out. Had blocks, mechanical squares—basic aptitude test, like the army. You’d fill that stuff all out. I could go through that stuff, myself, personally, myself, I can go through any of those tests pretty damn fast, you know. It’s just your mind gets oriented, you think about this stuff, you know, all your life. And this one guy—I know my neighbor, he’s a chemical engineer down at the Tech Center. Well somebody hit our mailboxes, knocked them flat. And he says, “Oh cripe, it knocked the post!” And I says, “Well, I fixed the posts back up.” And I got the mailboxes off. Then I got a couple hammers out there. And I’m in the driveway, sitting there. I sat down on the blacktop in my driveway, I says, “I’ll fix these up.” I started hammering. He says, “Boy, those mailboxes look almost as good as new.” I says, “Hey, General Motors spent all that money training me to make parts.” I says, “Hey, this is nothing compared to what I do.” We get cars, like, you hear of cars that are totaled—you know cars that are totaled. We don’t have a car—never have a car totaled. We could—because if I get a car in, and I’m allowed maybe up to $30,000 to buy parts to fix it. In other words, I could . . .

DC: You could put together any car?

AW: Yeah. Because there's no end to the money on our prototype cars, see. Our cars, like I say, it's worth a couple hundred thousand dollars. Then we get our tests all done, and then we smash it up, and then they write if off on their taxes too. We've done a lot of things. We've changed [?]. That was a lot of our jobs. Because like I say, we'd have a car, bring it in at 3:30, have it all done—and we'd get done before 12:30. The boss would set down, get a couple of pizzas. We'd sit there and eat pizza for the last half hour, and the car would be out there on the Proving Grounds.

DC: You had your work done.

AW: Yeah. Work was done. Boss would say, "Hey." A cup of coffee and pizza we'll have until they take the car out of there, see. Because we can beat anybody's schedule on the deal.

DC: Were there any challenges that you found particularly difficult?

AW: Oh yeah. They were all difficult. We'd find ways to get around them, though. This is what—I'll tell you what—a lot of times some of these boys would be from different states, from out west, or down south. Somebody's always got an idea, how to do something. And don't ever belittle anybody, because this one guy may come up with one good idea. And in fact, this one guy told me—we were trying to figure out how to change this one press steel on these arms. This guy says, "I know how we can do that." I says, "Tell us." And hey, it worked. He says, "I worked on cotton . . . ." They had these big things go in and clean the seeds out.

End of Tape II, Side A

Begin Tape II, Side B

AW: . . . boss, and talked—hey, we'd get things going. As long as we kept that line running. That was the most important part.

DC: Ok, yeah.

AW: Because we got—especially when you were on repair, and when dies would break or something—you got maybe anywhere from five to eight guys working there. But you got forty guys standing down there waiting, not doing nothing.

DC: They can't do their job until you're done.

AW: Yeah. So they'd find other things for those guys to do—sweep the floor, pick up things, or maybe another line, press line—as soon as we got done, though, they'd bring those guys—we worked through, like I say, our coffee breaks, work through our lunch hour, until we got that thing going, we got the presses going.

DC: Did you like that challenge?

AW: Yeah. We come back, we'd be all greasy. We had one foreman, we'd come back this one time, and we'd sit up on the benches, eating. This is about 2:30 in the afternoon. This big shot from upstairs comes down and says, "What's those guys doing sitting all around there eating and drinking coffee?" That foreman, [name?], he was greased up to his elbows, you know. We had changed that big press with the big control arms, and he says, "Hey, get your ass out of there!" I mean, this is a higher-up. The foreman says, "These men have been working all day long. We missed the coffee breaks, we missed the lunch hour." He says, "We got the presses going. We got production going again out there."

DC: So this guy came in and thought you were being lazy?

AW: Yeah! Thought we was sitting around not doing nothing, see. And so, he took off in the office, and Hank [name?]—he was our Superintendent. He was the top guy—he told him, and he walks out, and this guy's complaining about John and us guys sitting there. Hank says, "Why don't you get your ass back upstairs. We didn't ask you to come down here." And he says, "Well I'm the boss, and I can fire you guys." He says, "Go ahead. You fire us, and those guys too, and then so you can shut this place down." [laughs]

DC: So you felt powerful.

AW: Yeah. And they got the big wheel upstairs, big boss come down, and of course he heard that he told a guy to get back up in your office where you belong.

DC: OK, so the highest guy.

AW: Yeah, the highest guy.

AW: Because your foreman defended you here.

DC: Yeah. Oh yeah. That's why it was good, because he was right. Most of the time the foremen would jump right in there, you know, and he'd be so mad because he was working in grease too, you know.

AW: You were in it together.

DC: Yeah. It sounds like the foreman's job was going to be determined by how well *you* guys worked.

AW: Yeah. That was his job. His job was on the line.

DC: Yeah. Because if that press doesn't get going again . . .

AW: Yeah, but we got that press rolling again there, and we did the job in less time than they had scheduled, see. We got it knocked out. But like I say, we worked through our coffee times and our lunch hours—so our last hour and a half, we just sit there relaxing, you know.

DC: Which you deserved.

AW: Yeah. Of course somebody come down those stairs, I can see that, and that's what John told them. He says, "Where in the hell was you at an hour ago?" He says, "We were out there busting our asses out there all day long!" But see, we had a lot of good times. We had a lot of good times in the plant. Like I say, a lot of salary guys I got along good with. In fact, I remember that one time one of our office machines—[Greyhound?] food lines used to have the service for the cafeteria, and for all the machines. Like in our, over in engineering, we didn't have any cafeteria. We had to go over to the [Ad?] building if we wanted to use the cafeteria, but we had sandwich machines, and roll machines, and coffee machines, we had all that sort of stuff. And one time this one girl was sitting there, and she picked up this roll, and she took a bite out of it. And I was sitting at the next table, and she says, "This thing tastes kind of funny." And I says—I looked at it, I says, "What's the matter? Does it taste old or something?" She says, "I don't know." Well George Felton, he was our committee man, right there, he was right there and he had a magnifying glass in his Pontiac pocket. He said, "Let me see that for a minute." He says, "That rice there, rice, or that coating they got on, tastes kind of funny." He says, "Well I'll tell you what. That rice is moving." They were little tiny worms.

DC: Maggots, yeah.

AW: No, no. It wasn't a maggot, but like a maggot. But we found out later, they traced it back, it was in the pecans, in the nuts. They found these big cans that were full of them. They'd gotten warm, and they'd probably sit for a long time. Somebody probably got a better price on them. But anyway, I called—I says, "George," I says. He's right there. I says, "I want the committeeman. This roll I got here is full of worms." Well see, that salary guy couldn't say nothing. So meanwhile, of course, I'm raising all kinds of hell about it. I says, "I want my money back for the doughnut too." So the salary people, we got along pretty good a lot of times like that. You see, engineer was a different deal. The plain plant, there was a lot more friction between hourly and salary. In engineering, though, see, we worked with the guys, and—like I'd be—the first Tuesday of the month we meet, mostly hourly guys, out there [at McDonald's?]. The second Tuesday we meet at the [Lion's Den?] out there on [M-]59.

DC: Is this now or was that back then?

AW: No, not now. Last ten years, since I retired. All the retirees, see, all the engineers and hourly guys, we meet out at the Lion's Den. Well, a lot of these engineers, we [names some names], a bunch of these engineers I worked with. And these guys know me. They just—of course they're always hooting and hollering at me all the time, you know. One time one guy said something about me—well, he said, "Andy tells it like it is."

DC: Well, you know, I'd like to meet up with some of these guys too, if you can convince any of them to talk with me.

AW: Well, sometime, the second Tuesday of the month, we meet out to the Lion's Den.

DC: Where is the Lion's Den?

AW: It's right on 59. M-59. It's right up from Pontiac Lake Rd. Right around the corner from where I live at. I live right down around Pontiac Lake Rd., on [Bielby?] St. there, see. Come out there sometime.

DC: What time do you get together.

AW: Well, we start about 11:30, about 11:30. And we have lunch there, you know. And guys shoot the breeze. What we do, we go to, like we go to the Tech Center on trips. We go to—in the plants, and we get the latest things, like the wind tunnel. And I go with those—the engineers go and they take me along, and some other guys too that worked. Some of the guys in the Dyno Lab, you know.

DC: Well, if you're going sometime, I wouldn't mind going along, and you can tell them that I mean well, you know.

AW: Yeah, bring your book along and tell them what you're trying to do.

DC: If I could just get a chance to talk with a few more, that would be great.

AW: Yeah, because I tell you what, like I say, a lot of those are damn good guys. And they're sharp guys. A lot of those guys were [?] a lot of that shit that we got going on about—well, just like your cars now. We don't have a Pontiac or Chevy or Olds or Buick anymore. It's got the same engine for all the cars. Same suspension, the same things. Because it used to be that every car was different. Different engine and everything, see. Now it's just one car. Like I say, today these cars are made cheaper. It costs less to build them than it did in '74. Because they can build so damn many of them. They got the costs down. I just got a new truck, a pickup truck down there. It's a plain pickup truck I got. I ordered it, I told them I wanted a pickup truck. I says, "I want a red one, a green one, or a white one." I went down, they got that $2002 rebate, you know. Plus I had a $1000 rebate for a gas tank my boy had on his truck—my youngest boy—but he's still laid off and he can't afford to get a new one, so he gave it to me. So I got $3002 off. And I got that thing down to $15[,000]-something now. It's even got a disc player—a disc player in it. And it's got everything on the truck.

DC: It's loaded.

AW: Well, it's not really loaded, but it's got air conditioning. It's got all the basics.

DC: To me that's loaded!

AW: Yeah. Well, you know, you see some of these trucks that are. . .

DC: I know.

AW: Like Joe [?], he's got that Envoy, and of course he's got everything you can think of on that . . .

DC: To me, air conditioning and a working radio, and I'm happy.

AW: Yeah. You think about that deal out to the Lion's Den. In fact, you've got my phone number. You give me a call, and I'll tell you, but the second Tuesday of the month, we meet. A lot of those guys you may be able to talk to. They got a lot of information.

DC: If they'll tolerate me for a few minutes, I can at least get their names. I'll let you guys go about your business. I'm not going to interfere with your conversation.

AW: No, no, you, can talk to those guys, and write reports on the history of Pontiac Motors . . .

DC: Individual stories are really what's interesting.

AW: Yeah, this is what—you want to approach these guys with you want to make individual stories about engineering.

DC: That's what I want to do.

AW: Yeah, that way they'll go along with you. I tell you, we can get a hell of a lot of good information out of some of these guys.

DC: You mentioned that you met Victor Reuther a couple times. Did you pay much attention to the national union operations and stuff?

AW: Oh sometimes, yeah. We talked about it a lot of times. And I was all for it and all. And of course I made a big hit with them. I told them about this—I said, "Well, my uncle was in that Flying Squadron." Well he knew right away what the hell I was talking about, see."

DC: When did you first meet Victor Reuther?

AW: Up at Black Lake.

DC: It was at Black Lake, when you were up there. OK.

AW: Camping. I was up there camping, yeah. It was years ago. I was taking my—see, they got a big campground up there. Walter Reuther bought all that property, and they told

him he was foolish and stupid to buy it. But hell, that was one of the best investments the union ever made. They got their national headquarters right there, and they have a lot of training right there. In fact, Walter and his wife, Mae, were killed in a plane accident.

DC: Yeah, flying there, yeah.

AW: Well they cremated them, and right in the center they got a big flower thing—their ashes are all in that, right there. They scattered them all—the ashes are right in there to fertilize all the flowers.

DC: Did you pay attention to Reuther's policies when he was President of the union?

AW: Oh yeah. Some of the things I disagreed with.

DC: Such as?

AW: Some of the things, like pushing—they were helping hourly, and holding skilled trades back.

DC: Oh were they? OK.

AW: In fact, I belonged to the—I joined a—what did they call it back then?—there was a skilled trades break-off. We tried to break off from the UAW at one time.

DC: Did you. OK. Uh huh. What were the issues?

AW: Oh, about more benefits for skilled trades. Just because they were pushing mostly hourly—I mean . . .

DC: You mean in negotiations they were doing more . . .

AW: . . . more for productions. That's why we actually broke off and have a skilled trades council now. See, Walter Reuther pushed that, because actually, Walter Reuther was a toolmaker too.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

AW: So was Victor, you know. Those guys were all toolmakers. Skilled tradesmen. Skilled tradesmen were who built the union. See, they started off. Because production guys would threaten to go on strike, and the company would say, "So what?" But when the skilled tradesmen would go on strike, they couldn't replace them. See, and this is what built the union.

DC: So what became of that effort to split off?

AW: Well, that's when they set up—they set up—we threatened—actually, we just wanted to raise enough hell so we'd get a little attention. Because Walter Reuther come back with that, and says, "Hey, we're going to set up a skilled trades separate bargaining unit, and the skilled trades can veto a contract, or they can OK it." And same as the hourly can do the same. It used to be, see, we had almost ten times as many hourly guys as we had skilled trades. Now we're about the same.

DC: Really?

AW: Yeah, because they laid off so many hourly guys.

DC: Sure, right. Right.

AW: There are a lot of hourly guys went on skilled trades now. So actually, they're about the same.

DC: Back, you know, when you were—earlier in your career, like in the '50s and '60s, was there tension within the union local between skilled and the unskilled, I mean the trades and the production line?

AW: Oh, a couple times. One time we had a meeting, and this one black guy gets up and he says, "It's not right that skilled trades makes more money than I do. I'm a sweeper." And he says, "I demand the same money as they do." Well I stood up and I says, "Well, how much seniority have you got?" He says, "Well, I've got . . . " back to so and so. I says, "I've got more time than he has." I says, "Hey, by the way, if we get the same money, I want to bump that guy off his job." And he says, "What do you mean?" I says, "Forget the skilled trades. If I can make the same money, I'd rather be a sweeper."

DC: Was that true? Would you really rather sweep for the same money?

AW: Not really. It was just a bluff, you know. Because I'd done it before. When I was in school, I used to work part-time in the schools, doing the sweeping job. I says, "I've got experience in sweeping. I can handle a broom." But see, this is what the deal is, you know. You should be paid according to your qualifications. Like my family, all of my family, we've always been—if you're going to do something, do the best. Like, you got to do the best you can for your boss, and you'll have no trouble. Don't have to worry about getting laid off, especially when it was a non-union shop. My Dad worked for years at Pontiac Varnish, and he worked at Wilson Foundry. He said, hell, he never had no trouble or nothing. He'd complain. He'd go around and raise hell about something, they'd get it fixed. He said he could get more by going and seeing the plant owner, and complaining to the plant owner about something, than he could, say, if we had a union.

DC: Do you feel like the union was worthwhile for you in your career?

AW: Oh yeah.

DC: In what ways, exactly?

AW: Oh, the wages—otherwise we would have been working for a dollar an hour. If it weren't for the union, they'd be having us guys work for a dollar, two dollars an hour. And see, it used to be, years ago, before they had a union, a guy worked on skilled trades until they needed you, then they put you back on production.

DC: OK. Could flip you around.

AW: Yeah. But now they got this thing set up so that—they found that they need the skilled tradesmen. About Pontiac Motor Trade School, most of the guys I know I went to trade school with are on salary.

DC: They took that step, then.

AW: Yeah. Like I used to razz these engineers, I says, "'You know how they make an engineer, don't you?' He says, 'How?' And I says, 'Well you take a toolmaker, do a lobotomy on him, and you got an engineer.'"

DC: That will make you a lot of friends.

AW: Well yeah. But they know, I used to harass those guys all the time.

DC: I get that sense. What were race relations like in the plant? You mentioned the black sweeper stood up and said, "I want the same pay as . . . " What were race relations like in the plant?

AW: Oh, oh. There was tension among some of the guys. Of course, I cut it out—one time, we got out there one time, this guy says, "Oh, he don't like black people." And I says, "No, I don't like black guys. I like black girls though."

DC: Oh, OK.

AW: And see, of course there was a couple black gals there and I had my arm around one of the gals I was sitting next to. I put my arm around her, and I said, "I love black girls." And the guys were all laughing. And this one sweeper says, "Ah shit! I should have been born a girl." And we, of course, you know—it wasn't—I'm from up North, like I say, and it wasn't that meanness like some people have. Because I know so many of these guys from down South, I says, "Well, you guys are complaining about the blacks going to school," I says, "you guys will want to go to school . . . "—but I had a brother-in-law. My sister married a guy from North Carolina, Franklin, North Carolina—I says, "But you guys get a young black girl, you all want to screw her, but you won't go to school with her." Now, I says, "What's the sense of that?"

DC: What did they say?

AW: Yeah.

DC: How did they respond to you?

AW: Well, they'd sit there and they'd scratch their head a little bit. Then, you know, and he says, "Well, you got a point there." And I says, "Yeah." And he says, "Hey." I had told this black guy, I says, "You know, if they would just take—and all the black people have girl babies, and all the white people have boy babies, there wouldn't be no more race problems." He looked at me kind of funny. He says, "Yeah, you're right." All those white boys would be around chasing those little black girls. Because I know some girls who didn't know their—of course, a lot of them were a mixture. Like I was telling a buddy of mine I grew up with, I told you about, he had blue eyes and red hair . . .

DC: And he was considered black . . .

AW: And in fact I remember one time we was over to his house—his mother was like all black. His mother was. But his dad was Irish. But I got a big kick, I was over there one time, and me and this other white kid and him—and this other black kid, two black kids. There was about 5 of us there, playing at this house. We were doing something. He had an electric train. Well anyways, these two black kids started talking that mushmouth routine, and he got into it. And, of course, I didn't like it too much. I didn't say nothing, but his mother walked over, she—wham!—she backhanded him right across the mouth. And she's a black lady. She says, "I don't want to hear any more nigger talk in my house. You speak English, and if you can't, you won't play with those guys no more. You'll just play with Andy and the other guys over there." She says, "You're going to grow up, you're going to go to school, and you're going to go to college." And she says, "I don't want to hear any of that kind of talk." See, and this is the way a lot of black people used to be, years ago. And they didn't have the problems, you know, race problems, or nothing like that. To me, I got along with black people OK. I told [Minnie?] that one time-we had that black Bonneville—she sat back in that, and old John started laughing, he says, "[Minnie?], all I can see is your white elbows in that car." Because she's sitting there blending right into that black upholstery. And I was kidding her. I says—she liked old John—I says, "[Minnie?], you really like John. I bet if he told you to lay on the floor, you'd do it." She says, "I would. If he told me he wanted a piece, and wanted me to lay down right there, in front of everybody, I'd do it for him." The gals really loved him, but he didn't have much to do with them. He would just hug them. He would hug them, you know, and on their birthday he'd come up and give them a kiss, you know, and stuff like that. And the gals just loved him. But John—Roger Smith, why hell, he'd walk through there with his nose out of joint, you know, like he hated everybody's guts, and everybody just backed away from him.

DC: How often did he walk through?

AW: Not very often. Because he come down when I was building a Caprice, and he was going to come down. Well this guy come down there, and I was trying to keep the people out, because I got all my men working with grinders and stuff, and some of these salary guys

coming in there, and they had no safety glasses. And I says, "Hey, guys, get back and get some safety glasses before you come in here and get stuff in your eyes." And this one guy goes up to me, says, "Roger Smith is upstairs. He wanted to know what kind of reception he'd get down here." I got this rope in my hands. I says—it was a big red rope we used for things for shows, for the show cars—and I says, "I got this rope here. Tell that son-of-a-bitch I'll have it around his neck and he'll be hanging from that beam up there." He looked at me and his mouth dropped open. He turned around and stomped off, and an engineer says, "Jesus, Andy, that was Roger Smith's bodyguard." And I says, "Gee, I didn't know that." And he says, "I'll tell you what, though. You get a rope around that son-of-a-bitch's neck, I'll help you pull."

DC: Ooh.

AW: That shows you how well he was liked, by the engineers and salary guys too.

DC: Was it just because of his personality, or . . .

AW: Personality, and also cutting—he cut things out here, and cut things out there, things that didn't mean nothing, but it hurt a lot of people.

DC: Such as?

AW: Well, maybe some of the salary—he hurt the salary guys more than he did the hourly guys. You know, a lot of salary guys: "Well eliminate that job! We don't need that no more!"

DC: So cutting out jobs.

AW: Yeah. I mean draftsmen, and draftsmen were important. And cutting things out, cutting budgets. And you can only do so much. You step on people's toes, and you get a reaction. I know too much, there, I get carried on.

DC: No, I enjoy it. I think we probably both need to go.

AW: Yeah, I need to go get my wife there.

End of Interview