

Oral Histories

The American Auto Worker Project

Conducted by Edward Savelle  
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Part of an independent study of the  
UAW and rank and file auto workers  
from the 1960s through 2012

May and June, 2012

Project: The American Auto Worker  
Researcher: Edward Savela  
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*On June 19, 2012, Edward Savela met with UAW Local 900 Retiree Chair, Lloyd Allen, Jr., at the Local 900 offices at 38200 Michigan Avenue, Wayne Michigan. Mr. Allen spent 41 years working at the Ford Wayne Assembly Plant, many of those years representing the UAW workers at the plant.*

*ES We are talking to Lloyd Allen.*

*LA Lloyd Allen, Jr. by the way.*

*ES Lloyd Allen, Jr.*

*LA That's the way my daddy wanted it.*

*ES He's spending some generous time with me. Are you the retiree chair?*

*LA Yes.*

*ES Local 900?*

*LA Yes.*

*ES One of the biggest?*

*LA It's got 4,300 retirees.*

*ES How does that compared to 600?*

*LA Local 600 has more because they were four times bigger than us. At one time they had 16-17 thousand in that local. In our heyday we had 8,500. We are one of the bigger locals, yes.*

*ES What's interesting for me, and I'm just going to tell you briefly about me, is I grew up delivering the Detroit News the Detroit Pre-Press as a 12-13 year old kid.*

*LA So did I. But I delivered the Times for a while too. Detroit Times.*

*ES I think that might have been before my time.*

*LA Back in the 1950's.*

*ES I put myself through school and then some how through the world of happenstance I ended up in the South. It's different down there.*

*LA It's very different. I was stationed in the Navy in Norfolk, Virginia.*

*ES I'm an ex-Navy man too.*

*LA I was on the USS Douglas H. Fox DD79. I have two kids down there. So I visit there quite often and it is very different. When I would go visit my kids, first thing sometimes I would leave the plant and all our reps wear shirts with the name and titles and UAW's for the recognition in the plant. I learned you have to take them off. Don't wear them down on the plane. They view things different. But I'm proud to tell you this; my oldest son has an election next month for Business Agent down there, United Sheet Metal Workers, Local 100.*

*ES In North Carolina?*

*LA In Virginia. His local covers all of Virginia, a little piece of West Virginia, Cumberland, Maryland, and Washington D.C.*

*ES And it's already a union and he's running for Business Agent?*

*LA He's been on the board for 6-8 years, but now he's going to be Business Agent, full-time rep.*

*ES That's great. Congratulations. I hope he does well. Those are right-to-work states?*

*LA Yes.*

*ES It's hard to pull them off. I think Tennessee has more UAW. It's hard for me to understand the logic of people who would vote against their best interest. Like this Scott Walker thing.*

LA That amazes me. If I see a man who has a union and he is getting descent health care, a descent retirement, a descent wage, I want on aboard. I don't want to try to destroy him. I want to know, "How do you join?"

ES *That's right. That's the club I want to be in.*

LA I don't understand how a man with no benefits working for the bare minimum, how you can get him to stand aside, "I don't want that damn union?"

ES *Why do you think that is? Like I told you, I sent money up to the defeat Scott Walker campaign. I was very disappointed at what happened. It was just so much money.*

LA And yet, the Supreme Court didn't do us any favors. When you are looking at a Presidential race that is going to run a billion dollars, that is craziness. And some of it coming in from foreign governments. What are you telling me?

ES *I think it's even more than that. Yesterday in the news I heard that Koch was...*

LA The numbers are going crazy.

ES *Why do they not want the union so bad? I heard the Koch brothers themselves are contributing \$400 million. So it could even be more than \$1 billion could be \$2 billion.*

LA Like I said, the numbers are going crazy, but it's going to at least be \$1 billion. That's craziness in my world. Here in Detroit, we got a real good look at what money can do. We have been talking for four or five years about a second span to Canada to get the trucks to across. We have the Ambassador Bridge and the Windsor Tunnel. That's how you get to Canada from here. That's not good enough, there are too many trucks coming in. And either us or Buffalo, NY is going to get the second span, to tie directly to from our 75 to 401 in Canada without going through town.

ES *You have to get it here.*

LA Obviously we do, it means jobs. The owner of the Ambassador Bridge has spent millions telling these dummies, "You don't need that second span." Because he wants to build it himself. You know what? He got it voted down in Lansing. He owned that many of our legislatures and it pissed me off because there were some Democrats up there in that bunch.

ES *So he won?*

LA Now the Governor is going a different direction. On top of it, Canada has already said, "We want this done here, not in Buffalo. They said, "we'll put up our half for the bridge and we'll put up your half for the bridge and we will run the bridge, take the toll, until we get our money back. Then it will be split up.

ES *So you have Canada on your side too?*

LA Right. But this one multi-millionaire as held the whole thing up.

ES *What's his name?*

LA Matty Moroun. And he's just done it on the TV, ad after ad after ad, "You don't need this Bridge. In the end it will cost you money. Say "no" to the Bridge." Right below it, it says his company, International Bridge Crossing. That's his company.

ES *This is the first I've heard of that story. I heard it on the news this morning or last night.*

LA It got so bad, they had gone through this years ago, the state had built the highway to where you could get to the Ambassador Bridge with out going through the surface streets in Detroit. When it got to Moroun property he was suppose to connect to this and connect it to the bridge. When it came time, he didn't do that. He didn't build the road at all. He left it unfinished for five years until he went to Michigan Supreme Court. Finally a judge in Detroit locked him up. Him and his president of his company. Locked them up and said, "You can sit there until you tell me when you are going to finish this?" And then he started that campaign.

ES *Money is power. Citizens United.*

LA Who is Citizens United? We don't even know.

ES *All we know is the Supreme Court decision. And if we don't fix that, in my opinion, it's*

- going to destroy this country.*
- LA It's destroying it now when the foreign government can influence who's going to be your president. What other country would allow us to come in and pick their leaders for them. That's what causes war. I see it as a real threat. You have to get a handle on this. We have to finance it. Each candidate gets so much money, how you spend it is up to you.
- ES *I noticed this other thing, is there a political action committee or something? What's a V-Cap?*
- LA That's our political action committee.
- ES *That's what I thought. That's a great idea. It will contribute extra money to help lobbying and Lansing or wherever.*
- LA We get in the plant, you sign up to have so much a week took out. Then even in the retirees I encourage them to put \$25.00 a month in the V-cap. That money the union can spend on politics and nobody can bitch, because we gave it to them to spend it. It's not dues dollars.
- ES *That's right. It's their own personal investment. You know "grass roots" is how we have to do it, but even in this day and age we have to all give something to the cause.*
- LA I tell the retirees that every month. I tell them it takes a lot of them to make up for one rich guy writing a check. We have to put our money where our mouth is.
- ES *How about this guy that supported Gingrich. He just wrote a check for whatever the guy needed. Gingrich would have no money left, so he just wrote him a check to stay in the campaign. That's how Romney won Florida too.*
- LA It's scary when I picked up the paper yesterday, this guy Romney who doesn't live in the same world that I live in. He does not know what it feels like, when you come home tired and the wife says, "Hey look, you got to get some overtime, he needs braces, she needs some special shoes." You go, "Where in the hell am I going to get this?" He doesn't know anything about that.
- ES *He's building. He's taking a 3,000 home in Lahoya, California and increasing it to 11,000 square foot and putting in a car elevator; while he is running for President. How could somebody do this?*
- LA He doesn't live in our same world. To me, he's like a Chameleon. Whatever you want him to say, he'll say it for you. I saw him, one of the first people out of his seat to say, "Do not bail out the auto industry. Let them go bankrupt." The next thing I know, he's on the TV taking credit for it.
- ES *Yes, he said it was his idea.*
- LA I said, "Damn." Then I watch him craft a healthcare system for the State of Massachusetts, put it in, said it was the right thing to do, and then when President Obama took a look at it and said, "We need that nationally," and he patterned some of it right after that, all of sudden you are against it now. "Which way are you going here?" To me, once you make a stand that is your stand. That's why I said, I make no apologies for being a trade unionist nor a Democrat, because that's who I am. You can ask me any day, and the answer will always be the same. This guy gives a different answer on every answer.
- ES *Do you agree with me, a lot of ignorance. My wife says, "There are a lot of people who don't have time to learn what's going on and they just bury their heads in the sand."*
- LA They go for these thirty second sound bites. You just keep saying it over and over, tell the lie long enough, some idiots going to believe you. It doesn't many deflections from our side to lose an election. I look here at Michigan as the birthplace of labor and we are fighting right to work as we speak. That's craziness.
- ES *I want to hear about your career. But let me ask you this first. In UAW here in Michigan almost entirely line up with these causes that you and I support?*
- LA Are you talking about our membership?



ES Yes.

LA We are predominately behind, but it saddens me to say, some of our own people, I say it this way, it's my way of saying it, "If the union has done something wrong, what they have done wrong is they went in there and got us too damn much and turned half our own people in to Republicans.

ES *The old Reagan Democrats.*

LA I don't call them Reagan Democrats. If you vote Republican, you are Republican and that's just the way it is in my world. I can remember going in that plant in 1966, you couldn't hold a gun on any of them and make them put a Republican badge on and walk through that plant. Every man had a badge on, a Democrat badge. When Walter Reuther said, "This is our guy," 99% of them got behind him. Now we have to go campaign to these people. That breaks my heart.

ES *It's the money influence on them?*

LA It is, it's these thirty second sound bites, they think they are real in some kind of way. It saddens me when I have to take the mic in our retiree meetings and tell them, "I know damn well some of you voted for this Republican son of a bitch we got up here in Lansing. Someone voted for him. He got there. Sadly it some people right in this room." They all look.

ES *I've been watching the poles. The last couple poles were a pretty close. I don't understand that at all.*

LA Me neither. Especially for autoworkers. How do I have to tell you, we would not be sitting here today had Romney been in charge instead of President Obama, cause he would have settled and gone bankrupt. You would be drawing 65% of your pension from the Federal Government. You would have no health care and you are wondering who to vote for here? That's beyond me, because any president who has earned our support it's this president that we have now. He made no apologies. He stood up and said, "I believe in the auto industry." I never heard a President say that before.

ES *He took a chance in doing that.*

LA They kicked his manhood up around his adams apple for it, but he never wavered. That's what I tell the members, "We can't waver. Not on this man. If we don't get that one straight, who would want our endorsement after this?" They all know what he's done for us.

ES *Let's go back in time a little bit, if you don't mind. You were a Navy man? When did you start with the auto companies and UAW.*

LA I went right out of high school at age 18 into the Navy done four years. July, 1962 till August, 1966. Four years and one month because of Vietnam. They extended everybody three months, then came back after one month and said, "We'll let you out."

ES *So you are a Vietnam Era Veteran, same as me.*

LA I got discharged on a Tuesday at noon in Norfolk, Virginia and I worked my first shift across the street on Thursday, two days later at 3:42.

ES *You get hired in that quickly?*

LA They were hiring 100-200 a day.

ES *You left the Navy within a few days later you were working?*

LA I left there Tuesday at noon, I worked 3:42 Thursday over here.

ES *Wow.*

LA I was broke. I had a wife who was pregnant, I needed a job.

ES *That was fast they put you to work?*

LA Every factory was hiring.

ES *It was right here at Wayne?*

LA Wayne Assembly, I could have walked to Michigan Truck and got hired, I could have went down to Hydromatic. Every plant in Michigan, was hiring at that time. They

couldn't get enough help. No one wanted to work in a factory, because we had no benefits, we had no retirement.

ES *Was that true in 1966, the benefits and retirement?*

LA There wasn't retirement. We didn't get that until 1970 or 1973 agreements. I remember carrying the sign, "30 and out, 500 a month."

ES *That's great. Health care benefits didn't come until then either?*

LA We had a little piece, but nothing like we have today.

ES *The seniority system was in place?*

LA The seniority system was in place.

ES *Those are the three main benefits of pension the health and welfare and seniority system.*

LA The pension was not there and the healthcare was not much, just a little piece.

ES *The SUB pay was there?*

LA The SUB pay was there. I never drew any SUB pay, cause you had to have a year seniority. By the time I got a year seniority we were working 12 hours a day, six days a week.

ES *So you started on the line. What was your first job?*

LA My first job, I did the trim for station wagons. Coated trim, around the windows, over the wheel well.

ES *Ford Galaxy, Fairlane, what was it in those days.*

LA It was a Ford Wagon. It was every sixth job, building Ford Wagons, Mercury Wagons, the regular Ford and the Mercury.

ES *They were twelve-hour shifts, you said?*

LA Yes, there was no restrictions on over-time back then. You were there, you got paid 11 and a half, the half our was your lunch.

ES *They were two shifts back-to-back?*

LA Two shifts.

ES *Would they stop the line?*

LA No. He would come in, in the morning, watch his clock, watch his clock and then he would say, "OK, I got the next job. See you tonight." Then I would come in and say, "I got the next job."

ES *I haven't been in too many plants, I think it's changed around a little bit.*

LA That's the way we started. I didn't feel bad about it, because it was the job.

ES *You started in 1966 and retired when?*

LA 2007.

ES *2007?*

LA Yes.

ES *So you got 41 years?*

LA Yes.

ES *Wow.*

LA I didn't set out to have 41. We had a child later in life. I knew how old I was when I had that boy. I knew I wanted him to go to college. You can't pay that on retirement.

ES *Where's he going?*

LA He graduated from Michigan. He graduated in December 2006 and I retired in May 2007. I had always promised him, you bring me the grades and I'll bring you the dough.

ES *You started on the line with the trim on the wagons?*

LA I moved on to be a utility man. That was who would give everybody relief. Maybe a year later, I was a repairman. Trim and repair. Two years later, I got elected Committeeman.

ES *What year was that?*

LA 1968.

ES *So you rose pretty fast?*

LA I was shocked.

ES *You must have been well liked and respected.*

LA I had a big mouth. I had an opinion.

ES *You have to stand up for the rights.*

LA This is what I looked like in the 1970's [shows picture].

ES *You looked like Elvis.*

LA This is Nelson "Jack" Edwards, he was the first black Vice President of the UAW and he came from here.

ES *His plaque is out there I think?*

LA He got shot in 1970. That was his funeral. [Upon further research, it appears that Nelson "Jack" Edwards was shot to death in November, 1974, not 1970. The discrepancies in Mr. Allen's account were not discussed during this interview.]

ES *Did they ever catch the person?*

LA There was a lot of talk back then. It was 1970's, we had just gone through riots in Detroit.

ES *It was around the same year that Walter Reuther died in the airplane.*

LA Yes, few months before Walter.

ES *Bobby died in 1968.*

LA There was a lot of talk, some people feared, that he might be the first black President of the UAW.

ES *Did they ever solve the crime?*

LA Nope.

ES *What was his name again?*

LA Nelson "Jack" Edwards.

ES *Nelson "Jack" Edwards.*

LA As a matter of fact, he owned a bar at Livernois and Warren in Detroit. In the Assembly plant over here, that's where they were. They moved out here in 1952. Prior to that they were in Livernois and Warren.

ES *Kelsey Hayes use to be over there. Do you remember Kelsey Hayes?*

LA Yes. Desoto was over there. We were always trying to raise money for election. He owned the sportsman bar up there, and we were up there one night having a fundraiser for our Caucus. Myself and another guy left there about ten minutes to two. About five after, somebody shot him.

ES *Really?*

LA Speaking of Reuther got killed shortly after that. I think there was some shit in the game there and I think he was "offed," I really do.

ES *In those days, it seemed like so many, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Bobby and two key people from the UAW. It was a different world back then.*

LA I was fortunate enough. I don't know if you have ever heard of Black Lake.

ES *I just heard about it from someone else I was talking to in the hall. What is Black Lake?*

LA That's a training center in Michigan, almost to the bridge. Its in a place call Onaway, 1,000 acres right on Black Lake. Beautiful place. That's where take our people to revive and get them ready to go. Everybody gets the same message. That was Walter's dream. That's where he was going when the plane went down. He was going into Pelston Airport, which is 20 miles from Black Lake. The plane supposedly had trouble and went down there. Black Lake opened up three or four months later. I was fortunate that Region 1-A, which is what we are all in around here, was the first class to go through Black Lake. So I was there when they spread his ashes, him and May. His brother, Victor spoke, but I was fortunate enough to be there for that.

ES *By that time, you had only been in the union four years, but you had already been on the fast track with union.*



LA By that time, it was kind of unheard of for a 22 year old to get elected. Most Committeemen were 40, 45 years old, been in the shop 20 some years. They were hiring so many people, every plant. They would have these new member orientations before you would go to work. Explain to them what benefits you had, this and that. The Regional Director at the time, used to take me around to them and tell them, "There's room in the UAW for you youngsters. Look at this guy, Committeeman." I was 22 and looked 12.

ES *What's your speculation of that airplane crash?*

LA I think somebody killed him. Period. Just the same as somebody killed Jack Edwards. After Jack got killed, his own family wouldn't talk to anybody. Not even the people here.

ES *They were afraid to.*

LA They stayed home and shut up.

ES *They were afraid to?*

LA Yes, they didn't want to talk to anyone.

ES *Walter's daughter wrote a book. I'm trying to pick that book up. I don't know if you have read that?*

LA No, but I've read the brother's Reuther. That was a good book.

ES *That's the one I haven't heard of. Several people have told me in reading some of the Walter Reuther information that he was really ahead of his time. He was a real liberal progressive leader. Many of times ahead of the rank and file in thought.*

LA I know he had a special touch. When he spoke, all listened. I can remember him coming on the TV in 1967, he said, "Boys we have a tentative agreement, I'm telling you to go back to work." That's all it took, we were back. There wasn't a lot of disbelievers when they presented this contract. Everybody seemed to know, "That's as good as he can get this time." I remember they were hollering at one of them. You are always going to have a few loud mouths, "The union fucked us again." And they were tearing apart the agreement. I remember Reuther took the mic and he said, "Brothers, there are no such thing as a perfect contract. A perfect contract is one in which both sides feel like they got fucked." That's what he said.

[The President of Local 900, Anderson Robinson, Jr. "June Bug," enters the room and a short conversation ensues.]

ES *I'm really interested in the 1970's and 1980's, if you could tell me about that. What happened in the 1980's that I could see was a lot of migration to the cheaper labor, to the right to work states.*

LA The unions, all of them, we miss that, when we did not shut down every airport in this country behind the air traffic controllers. We should have picketed every airport in this country and shut them down told them, "You are not just going to fire a bunch of union guys."

ES *That's where we lost our footing.*

LA That's where I think I started to see a decline.

ES *The government, Reagan exercised that authority and nobody called his bluff.*

LA Sometime labor peace is good and sometimes it's not good. We had a thing here at Ford where you could have hired in 1977 and worked thirty years to 2007 and retired and never saw a work strike of any kind. You have got to be out there on that picket line to know what it feels like. The attitude just seemed to change.

ES *Complacency maybe?*

LA Yes. They will just get it for us. All you can do is huff and puff. You don't actually have to go on strike. They weren't willing.

ES *Some of this struggle is building character and building strength for the union.*

LA I think it does. You got to get in the fight before you realize what the fight is about. If



- you never have to fight, you are going to start taking things for granted. Look at today. We got people that have never been in a fight. They don't know how to fight. So they are standing there taking it.
- ES** *We had shop stewards. In the plant, you have Committeeman for different departments? They would report to shop stewards?*
- LA** We didn't have stewards. Our reps were full time. We have Committeemen who would be over each department. We had three bargaining Committeeman who are over the Committeeman over the whole plant.
- ES** *That was their full-time job?*
- LA** That was also their full-time job. Then we had the President and the Chairman on top of that.
- ES** *Of the Local?*
- LA** Yep.
- ES** *The Committeeman worked too?*
- LA** Nope. We were full-time union reps. I spent from 1968 to 2000 on the Committeeman, I was a Bargaining Committeeman and Health and Safety Rep. In 2000 I took a little break. Running out of fire. I went back to work. For the last eight years, I was a clean-up guy. Then I retired. Came to a retiree meeting, got the itch again. I know my sweet wife, we were standing here a year ago for an election, and we were passed a card. She looked at me and said, "I thought we were through with this shit."
- ES** *I think you like it. It's your life*
- LA** It's part of me, it's who I am.
- ES** *So now you can come here. You are retired. You can come here for functions.*
- LA** I sit on the Board. A Retiree Chairman is an officer of the local. So I am on the Board also and they put you on the retired workers council for the region and I sit on a few other councils. It takes up some time, but I enjoy it. It's what I like to do. At my age, it's good if you feel useful. Why get up every morning, if I'm not useful to someone?
- ES** *I sold my business, went back to study. Not making any money doing this. It is enjoyable for me.*
- LA** I get a little expense check and stuff, but I truly am not in it for the money. I would do it for free.
- ES** *You still get up to Black Lake?*
- LA** I'll be going up there in a month. I go to a Retiree Retreat up there for Region 1A the first of July every year.
- ES** *Do the other Regions?*
- LA** Yes, they send theirs up there.
- ES** *I met Linda Ewing, you must know her? From the Solidarity House? She was research or something?*
- LA** Can't say as I know her.
- ES** *She told me down in Tennessee is Region 8.*
- LA** They go to Black Lake too for their seminars and their summer schools.
- ES** *Even in those right-to-work states they able to organize. Like your son for example.*
- LA** We've got to. One thing I truly believe, Bob King told us this a couple years ago and I believe it. If we don't organize them foreign transplants in our country, the UAW is going to cease to exist. I'm afraid of that. So I think its Nissan we are trying to get to now.
- ES** *In Mississippi.*
- LA** There is other leverage than that. We have talked in terms of, "Why do we have to just picket Mississippi? Why don't we picket every Nissan Dealer across the nation?"
- ES** *Feet on the street are pretty important.*
- LA** Whatever it takes, we got to get it done.

**ES** *I admire your commitment. You are committed. I wish there was something I could do to help you guys out. What I would like to be able to do is show the average person what the union...I read the book, "The Jungle" by Upton Sinclair, talked about the stockyards in Chicago. This is before organized labor, before any labor rules in the early 1900's. People don't understand, white-collar and blue-collar. If a guy fell in the vat or hurt himself on the job, they just get another guy. In contrast to that I was talking to a Wixom guy couple weeks ago.*

**LA** We don't even say that. We need somebody over there. You know what we tell them? "Send me another head." We don't call it a guy or girl, we say, "send me another head. I need three heads."

**ES** *The Wixom guy told me there was sort of a slow down there, during the 1980-1983. He started in 1974. Tell me about the imports. In 1966, there wasn't maybe one.*

**LA** You would point to them, cause there was so few of them. And, you'd laugh at them. Japan stood for them crazy ass toys they'd send over here and everything broke. They didn't have no quality or no styling to the cars.

**ES** *As they progressed did you see the effects in that?*

**LA** I did, but it took me awhile to know where we were getting sold out. We got sold out in Washington. It was hard for me to understand when they came in, in the late 70s, early 1980s and said you had to be more like the Japanese. I go, "Excuse me, we invented the production line. We invented this. Now all of a sudden, we need them to teach us how to do it?" Them guys aren't bullet proof.

**ES** *Do you think tariffs and things like that should have been?*

**LA** Even today, we can take this same little Focus that we are trying to compete with their little cars, take it to Japan and they want a tariff on it, so that ours cost \$30 grand and theirs cost \$20 grand. The playing field has always been like this. My argument is how come it can't be like this and we could truly compete. You tie one of their hands behind their back and say, "You are not winning the fight." Come on man. It's such a PR job, was done on us. Again, I'm going to fault my union in that we should have had some PR people out there too, talking about what we do. We just set there and we let this concept get out there, "That them auto workers are under-worked and over paid, pampered, petted, nobody does nothing in those plants." I'm thinking to myself, "Excuse me, my plant pumped out 1600 units a day." Who do you think built them, if we didn't? Somebody in there is doing something. You don't see the line of cars coming out of there. That used to just burn my ass, when they didn't think we worked. I'm thinking, "I should take you in there and chain your ass up to that line and see what you think of it then."

**ES** *Or just work it for half an hour.*

**LA** Work it just a day, you won't have any more questions. I remember in the early 1980s we had just launched the Escort, little car. I come out of the plant, I was a Bargaining Committeeman then, it was 7:00 or 8:00 in the evening, I'd gotten hung over from the day shift or something. There was a young guy and his wife and two little kids. They were in front of the plant. I had parked there and they looked like they were looking for something. So I said to them, "Can I help you?" He said, "Well yes, I hope so. We from Texas, that's our new Escort there. We are up here vacationing, and someone told us this is where they built it, we wondered if we could take a look at where they built it?" I said, "Of course you can. Come on." I took them in the plant. I started at the body shop. Showed them how it went in the paint and we got over on chassis and the lady said, (and I'll never forget this), "I don't see no one standing around." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, we heard people just stand around in here. I don't see anyone standing around in here." I said, you won't see anyone standing around in here, this is final assembly." I thought, "Where are we at if that's what people think?" But I think a lot of

it too was jealousy. Jealousy is a terrible thing. As we moved along I saw the difference in the six days when I first started working, if I stopped after work and got a cold beer at the bar and someone would say, "Where do you work?" I would tell them, "Fords." They'd say, "I wouldn't work there, they could shove it up their ass." Cause there was nothing there, no money, no nothing. I know before I retired, I could go in that same bar, which I still do today. They'd ask, "Where do you work?" I'd say, "Ford." "Man, can you get me in?" Something changed, because it was not a desirable job when I got there. They hired 150 a day and 175 would quit. You tell a guy to go on relief, you'd never see him again.

**ES** *The real shift from it being a good job, but not lucrative with the protections health and benefits and stuff that was a shift you saw kind of emerging in the 1970s.*

**LA** Late 1970s to the early 1980s.

**ES** *That's when the complacency came and so on and things like that. I envied the autoworkers. None of them that I knew was rich. You could raise a family and your wife didn't have to work.*

**LA** I didn't go in there to get rich. I just wanted some security for my family. Which every man does. Thanks to the union, that's what I got. I could have never sent my kid to college. I couldn't go to college, my dad didn't have no money. I remember asking him, "Can I go to college?" He said, "First of all, I've got four kids. I can't do for you what I won't do for the other three. I can't afford to send you, let alone all four of you. So get that out of your mind." When you get out high school, it's real simple back in 1962. Rich ones went on to college, the poor ones went to Vietnam. That simple.

**ES** *That's exactly right or they got in the Navy like you and me.*

**LA** I was always told, "You have to do your part. You can't be a slacker." My dad was WWII under Patton, Wounded twice, Prison of War for 11 months, Bronze Star. He'd been around. He knew what it was all about. I remember him telling me at the Federal building when he took me down to be inducted, "Congratulations, you are a man. I'm proud of you. You come home in four years. If you have just one stripe with an honorable discharge, I'll be so proud of you, I could bust. If you should receive less than that, please don't embarrass by coming home." I remember in boot camp, these guys going over the hill and I'm thinking, "I've got nowhere to go. I can't go over the hill."

**ES** *We have a lot in common. My step-dad raised me and I was closest to my grandfather. Every five years, he's have a new Ford. He had a 1955 Ford, I was born in 1952, but I remember that, because he had it until 1960. White and blue. In 1960, he had a silver 1960 Ford. In 1965 was the last one he bought it was a Fairlane 500, plain vanilla white car. Of course, he retired in 1970 and then he died in 1975. He died fairly young. When I was 18 it was time to hit the road in my family. I couldn't afford to go to college either.*

**LA** That's the way it was in our day. When you got out of high school, you either went and got a job or you went in the service. You got out, you didn't stay and you didn't want to. Not like today, kids will stay until they are 50 if you let them.

**ES** *What's your opinion when Obama bailed out Chrysler and GM and Ford didn't get a bailout.*

**LA** They borrowed money from the banks.

**ES** *Ford stayed solid throughout this and they weren't involved in the bailout. It was just Chrysler and GM. I remember the day that Rick Wagner got canned right after the bailout. I thought it was a long time coming in my personal opinion. What was your opinion of big picture management in general of the Big Three. As far as competency.*

**LA** Competent but in my mind, they tried to take too much out. They didn't leave enough for seed. When I first got into Ford, you didn't look up and see every member of management got a bonus, this damn big and the head man got \$40 million and this one got \$20 million and this one got \$15 million. You never saw that kind of stuff. But when



- they started doing that, the when hard times came, there was no money to the side to help them out. They took it all out when it came in. That's what I thought I'd seen there.
- ES** *I read a book by Thomas Sugrue. He talked a lot about automation and about how that affected jobs. How that reduced the work force. His timing on it, seems different than my perceptive of timing on it. But that was one thing that GM and Ford had better than Chrysler. He even goes back as far as Hudson and Studebaker and some of the smaller companies in the 1950s. Can you talk to me a little bit about automation in the plant and what that did?*
- LA** I remember when it first came.
- ES** *When was that?*
- LA** I want to say middle 1970s or earlier. They weren't very complex robots. I can remember one time, one of the first piece of automation we had in our plant we had an instrument panel line and when we got done with them, we set them in these big buckets and they'd run them over to the Trim Shop to be put in. That's back when all the instrument panels were the same colors as the cars. So you had many different colors. They brought this robot thing in to pick them out of the baskets and set them on the lines and when they got done picking them off the lines put them in the basket to go to Trim. I was coming up the aisle one day and I heard this hell of a racket and I looked up and this thing was picking up and pitching them. We laughed at the first robots. Then they got so sophisticated. I represented the Paint Shop over here for about 20 years. When I first got to Paint, I was representing 345 people. When I left in 2007, there was 82 in the paint shop. All of the rest of it was robots. It seems worse than that today. I can see management trying to save a dollar on that, but it's kind of a double edge sword. Them robots aren't going to buy a car.
- ES** *You can't fault them for that? It's technology and it's advancement.*
- LA** You have to change with the times or you'll cease to exist. I think that's why the auto industry, in my opinion, got in trouble because they didn't want to change. You have to embrace change, that's what it's all about.
- ES** *So even though that would have resulted in fewer rank and file workers, it would have made a stronger auto industry in general?*
- LA** I think so. If you can't compete with the rest of the world, you are going to fall by the waist side. The only thing that pisses me off about competing with them is when the playing field is like this instead of like this. And it's still like this. I noticed the trend is starting to turn a little bit. China's people are starting to wake up a little bit to that, "Why am I working 18 hours a day for a bowl of rice?" They are starting to demand a few more pennies per hour and we are seeing work coming back now.
- ES** *I heard that.*
- LA** Because with the shipping cost and all this stuff, we cannot compete with them. It's not that I like it, but we have that two-tiered wage, that can compete with them.
- ES** *Talk to me a bit about the two-tiered wage. I was reading this in the archives. I was a CPA down there and I am a little familiar with some of the auto industry down there in Alabama. I remember asking and I think they were hiring people at \$14.50 an hour. Just a few years ago. How can you support a family at \$14.50 an hour. You have to have two people working and that still isn't enough.*
- LA** That was part of the crash of the American Auto Industry. When you go to the bargaining table the health of the company depends on what we are going to talk about here today. Things got so bad, I hated two-tiered wage. There is no way that I feel its fair we should be working side-by-side doing the same job and not making twice as what you are making.
- ES** *So they kind of red-lined.*
- LA** No that's creates the halves and halve not within a union and in my humble opinion that's



- not good. But at the same time, I'm not going to fault the union. They've done the best they could, because you had to live to fight another day.
- ES** *When did all that come into play?*
- LA** 2000, a little bit after.
- ES** *Somewhere around that period of time, there was that standard wage and then you got hired at this date, you got this wage. And that wage was dramatically different.*
- LA** It was half.
- ES** *Half?*
- LA** But as I said, you have to do what you have to do. If that's all there is here today that's all there is. You have to keep the beast running.
- ES** *You have to live to fight for another day is what you said on that. You are right about that.*
- LA** You got to do what you got to do.
- ES** *I left Detroit in 1980. I grew up in 1970s went to the Navy, came back went to school and left in 1980. That was a pretty good time. Then Reagan came in and you brought up the Air Traffic Control thing. That was something you really feel strongly about. Make a stand.*
- LA** To me that was the turning point. When they saw the unions not make a stand that told them what they needed to know.
- ES** *Did the unions not get together at all back then? Was there some talk about that? It was a dramatic thing.*
- LA** They weren't coordinated. Me personally, I picked it out at Detroit Metro with a bunch of guys from this Local, we went out there a couple days. But it never took off. We were the only union out there. And even our union wasn't pushing it as hard as they should have been on that.
- ES** *Do you think the media coverage had something to do with it?*
- LA** The media is not our friends. They never have been, they never will be. Every paper, news corporation, they are all Republicans. I have seen them when we were on strike; I've seen them right over there at that local over there. I've seen T.V. 4 come out here and talk to 100 guys. And the 99 who said, "I have faith in my union," the one asshole, who made us look stupid, made the news. When they would come to me, I would tell them, "Get the fuck away from me. I don't have anything to say to you." Nothing. They never gave us a fair shot. They never will. I have no use for any of it.
- ES** *In summary, that turning point, the big money that's in politics? How's the Rick Snider thing going? How's that recall on him.*
- LA** They are not going through with the recall on him. After they seen what happened in Wisconsin, and lets get it real straight. That wasn't the people of Wisconsin speaking.
- ES** *It was the money?*
- LA** It was the \$30 million that was pumped in there. I think it was \$30 million. It was a crazy number from out of state. They raised more money from out of state, then in state. So that wasn't the people of Wisconsin talking. They don't want to look bad on that right now. Our main initiative is to get on the ballot, collective bargaining. But we have a right to collective bargaining by law in Michigan. That will end that right to work BS and get that through.
- ES** *How's that look? Do you know?*
- LA** I think we have a shot at it, but it all depends on, do we get our people out in the fall? When you start counting noses, that's where the rubber meets the road. You fall a few short... I'm convinced we not only have to return Obama, we have to send the man some help. If we don't do those two things, I'm not sure the unions will be around to fight four years from now.
- ES** *Yes, that's a scary prospect.*

LA Yes it is. It is for this old union guy.

ES *I told you I was a CPA, worked with a lot of accountants, white-collar environment most of my life. But those people don't realize that the 40 hour week, paid over-time, health and welfare, 2-3 weeks of vacation, OSHA, Workers Comp. All of those things are outgrowths of union demands. The unions got those, not just for the unions but for the non-union shops and the white collar guys as well. Do you believe that?*

LA Anywhere you have a union the standard of living goes up for everybody. The foreign transplants in the south, they are paying them pretty decent wages and pretty descent benefits to keep the union out. They will pay them the same benefits we are getting, just to keep the union out.

ES *Maybe just a fraction lower and they have more control. I think they like the control factor and the seniority factor.*

LA Especially the control factor.

ES *When I was a Teamster, I remember the great job security and protection of being in the union. I thought that more than anything else was the fact that there couldn't be capricious firing of people. "I don't like you. I'm going to replace you and bring in my brother-in-law."*

LA I grew up in a union family. My dad when he was on strike with the Teamsters, I can remember my mother cooking in the kitchen to feed the guys on the picket line. In our kitchen, I have seen Jimmy Hoffa, Fred Fitzsimmons, and Bobby Holmes. I didn't know they were big shots when I saw them and they weren't really big shots back then. But they were eating in our kitchen. My dad used to say these words over and over, "I'm going to tell you something and don't you ever forget it. You are the son of a poor son of a bitch and the union and the Democratic party is where there's room for you and don't you ever let somebody bullshit you." He told me that my whole life. Did he believe it? I think he did. We had him in hospice over here the hospital. They told us ten days, two weeks. Third day, I go up there to see him. Here's pop. Got the bed propped up, sitting up and got his hair combed with a big smile on his face. I said, "What's up pop?" He said, "Today's the day. Go to City Hall and get my absentee ballot, starting today. Go get it and bring it here, because I am going to vote against this Republican son of bitch even if I'm dead." That's what he told me.

ES *Which one was it?*

LA Old man Bush. The other Bush. There is a scary thing. That was the living proof that showed me, if you have enough money, you can elect a gorilla. He will go down as the dumbest one son of a bitch to have ever sat in that chair.

ES *You'll appreciate this Lloyd. You know the "W" stickers? I don't know if you ever saw them? They were all over Alabama. I'm a Democratic activist down there. I had hundreds of these made, "W"orst for bumper stickers. I bought them and gave them out for free. Another one was "W"armonger. I'd just buy them and give them out to everybody.*

LA He was the only President in my lifetime and I'm a life-long Democrat. I'm happy when a Democrat is in office and not so quite happy when a Republican is. But I do respect the chair they sit in. The President of the United States will always get the proper respect out of me, I don't care if it was Mitt Romney. But I could listen to Reagan, but not agree him. I could listen to George Herbert Walker. Didn't agree with a lot he said, but I could listen to the man. George W. Dummy, I would change the channel, I couldn't even stand to hear him speak. I couldn't do it.

ES *I can appreciate that. Would you mind introducing me to maybe a couple other people? I'm only in town this week so I don't know if you have anyone in mind or anything like that. I'm trying to get about ten, if I can. Not from you, I have some others. In fact Local 22 has a retiree meeting on Thursday.*

**LA** That's Cadillac.

**ES** *Yes, Cadillac. They have offered me a chance to come out there. I don't have a special meeting, but I get to meet some and I think they are going to let me say a couple things.*

**LA** Too bad we didn't hook up a little earlier cause we had our meeting on the 7<sup>th</sup> and are done for the summer. We always take July and August off.

**ES** *Thursday, Local 22. George McGregor.*

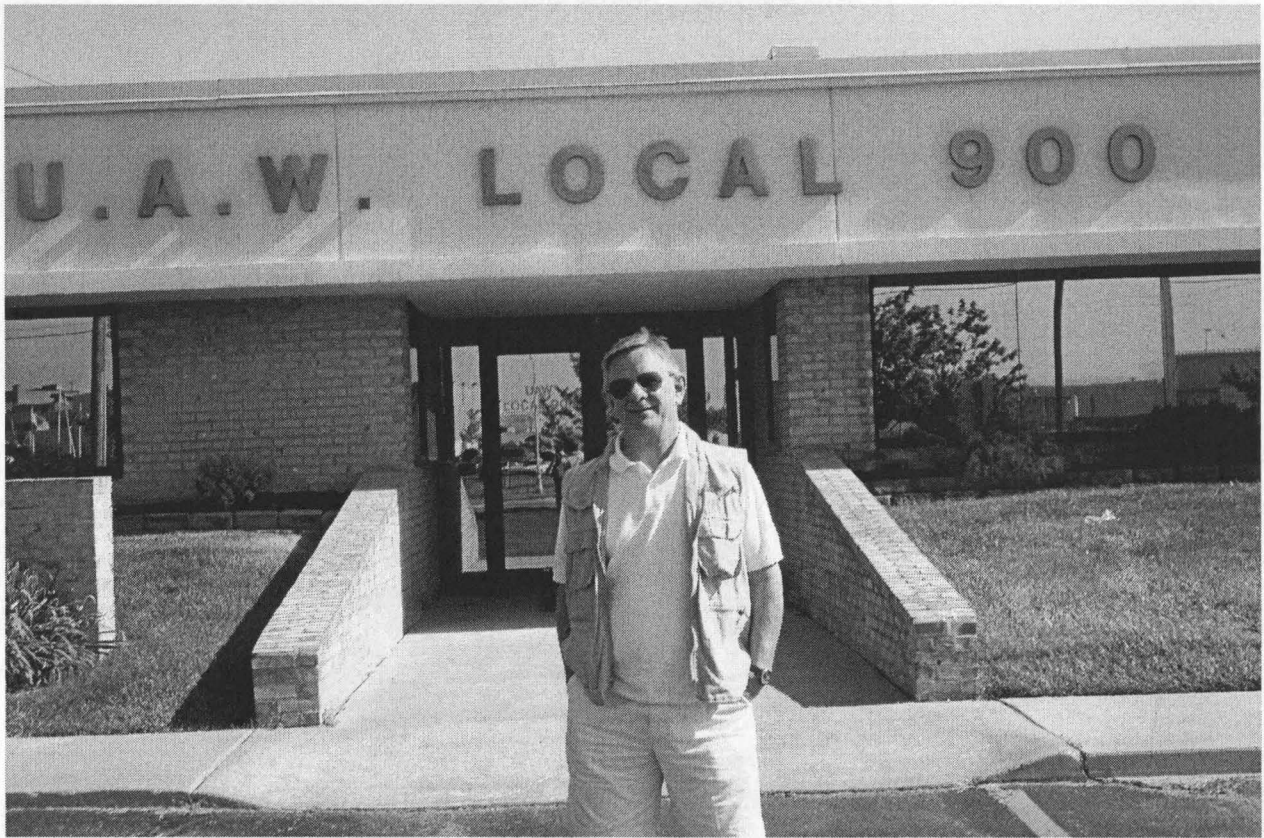
**LA** No, I know there are some older ones out at 22.

**ES** *And with Randy Sandusky. They've asked me to come by. Tomorrow I have Harvey Hawkins at 2:00. But anybody else you could think of? I know its short notice.*

**LA** I can make some phone calls. I still got your number at the house.

**ES** *It would be very helpful for me. I certainly appreciate it. [Researcher ends the interview with his thanks]*





Historical researcher, Edward Savela, at the Local 900 offices in Wayne, Michigan.



The Ford Wayne Assembly plant, Wayne, Michigan, June 2012.