

Oral Histories

The American Auto Worker Project

Conducted by Edward Savelle
The University of Alabama-Birmingham

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
The University of Alabama-Birmingham
Interview date: May 31, 2012

On May 31, 2012, Edward Savela met with Mark Murray, retired Ford UAW auto worker. Mark spent his entire 32 year career working on the assembly line at Ford's Wixom Plant in Wixom, Michigan. The plant was closed in 2007 and remains idle today. The interview took place at the DoubleTree Hotel in Novi, Michigan.

ES *Hey Mark.*

MM Yes, I'm here. My seniority date, yes, yes 7/25/74.

ES *What's today's date?*

MM 5/31/12

ES *I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me today Mark.*

MM My pleasure.

ES *I'm just interested in, as a Historian, in talking to you as a UAW autoworker. You had a long career there. I'm curious if you will explain to me your career.*

MM I started July 25, 1974. My hire-in date at Ford Motor Company, Wixom. I spent my whole time there in Wixom. I was fortunate to spend my whole time at one plant, where a lot of people bounced around. I was fortunate enough that was my home plant, my whole time there. In fact, June 1st it will be six years that I left Ford Motor Company. I retired.

ES *You retired in what year?*

MM June 1, 2006

ES *32 years?*

MM 32.3 months and tomorrow will be six years I left the company. Seems like yesterday I was still there. I don't miss the work, I don't miss the grind of it, but I miss the people, the friends and relationships you made through the years. That's hard work. You hear these people that say, "Oh, they are over paid, they are over paid". Maybe to a certain stand, that is true. I could get in that issue too. I'd like to see these guys say they are over paid. These guys are the same guys that would be walking out at break time, because they couldn't do it. Working the line is tough. The line does not stop. Over and over again it just tears down the body, over time. It is a tough job.

ES *When you started in 1974, what did you start doing?*

MM I hired in the paint shop and at the time, when the cars were ready to go in and be painted I had to take this sponge and dip it in some liquid and it would burn. No gloves. The UAW helped me out there. That was one benefit for a union. If it was up to management I would be putting my hand in that solvent to wipe down the car. The union got me the gloves. If I stayed with the company, they would have just let me use my hand the whole time. That wouldn't have worked. That's what I did first. I just scrubbed own the car with this solution so the paint would stick. The Foreman at the time, was kind of mean towards me. You are going to run into people like that. The union helped me out with that guy. Then I got transferred to wet sanding and we went in the back, which was good. We were kind of in our own little group. We went in the back, we sanded the cars down. After the primer coat, another thing to get done before sealing it with the paint. That was a good area. Just because of the fact we had our little corner. It was nice. It seemed like you were away from people and there wasn't so much pressure. This was a good atmosphere to work back there. I did that for a while. Then they eventually eliminated that area. They kept us there as long as we could cause we were in the back and no one really ever came back there, so nobody knew we were there. Eventually they found us and we got

eliminated. I could have done that for 30 years. We had our own break area and everything it was just like we had our own little world back there. It was pretty good. After that closed down, I went down to Trim. I spent the next thirty years down in the Trim Department.

ES *What was that?*

MM At that time they had separate line. We were running the T-Bird down there, we had three or four different car makes and they were on different lines as was real big back in 1976 and I was pretty much there the whole time until I retired. Put in windows, etc. The first job I had was putting the gas pedals in and putting wires in the old dimmer switch where you had your low beams and high beams where you had the little switch on the floor.

ES *A little silver switch?*

MM Yes and you would click it when you were driving the car. I put that in and put a wire on it and running the wire. And then that job got eliminated, cause I guess technology got better where they didn't have the dimmer switch any more. Then I kind of jumped over and I was on the AC job putting the air conditioning unit in. That was a two man job. I was on the front side. We would have a man go in the car, put the inner part in and would come out with some studs, so I could put the outer power in. I would fasten it down with bolts and nuts. It was a two man job. The jobs I liked were the jobs where you worked by yourself. When you worked with somebody else and they were messing around and you were going down the whole, which means, you are going down the line past your work area. Getting in other peoples' work area.

ES *And you are responsible for someone else?*

MM Hope he was on his game, cause you are relying on him too. He started the whole thing by putting in the inside. I couldn't do the outside unless he put in the inside. You kind of had to depend on that person to do his job.

ES *What lines were they running through? You had said the T-Bird. How many different car lines ran through Wixom?*

MM We always did the luxury cars. T-Bird wasn't luxury, but we were running it at that time. We had the Lincoln Town Car which was our bread and butter for the whole time I was there. We had the Continental and they ran the T-Bird. They would bring it different cars they would be there a little bit, then they would ship them off to a different plant. This is back in 1974. When technology got better, they shortened every thing up, shortened the lines. Instead of having separate areas they had it all one area. They had separate area for T-Birds and a separate area of Lincoln and Continentals being made they were running on different lines. They got rid of the T-Bird then they put it all on one line where the Town Car and Continental would be on the same line, so the place wasn't broke in two.

ES *At that time the Continental and Town Car were basically the same with minor exceptions?*

MM You could run them down the same line, but the T-Birds had different parts. Other things that build it different from a luxury car cause that was a luxury brand a Town Car Continental. You had two different kind of equipment that would go on so they couldn't take the same equipment, so they had to be run on different kind of line to put their parts on.

ES *Did you work all different shifts while you were there?*

MM When I first hired in at the Paint Department for the first couple of years I was on day shift. When I got bumped downstairs to Trim I was on afternoons. I pretty much worked my entire career on afternoons. Which I would prefer to work anyways on the afternoons. Day shift, you got all the big boys there and they always walking through the place. Just seems like on days it was more intense kind of atmosphere. In the afternoons they are gone. It was more relaxed in the afternoon. It was just smoother. I just enjoyed afternoons better.

- MM** We were just talking about working afternoons and I just prefer afternoons.
- ES** Even today?
- MM** Even today. If I'm working I'd rather work the afternoon shift. If you work the afternoons, you don't have to worry about hearing alarm clocks go off. When you work days I found out you are always looking at the clock every hour cause you don't want to oversleep or anything, so it seems like you really don't get a good nights sleep, cause half the time you are looking at the clock cause you don't want to be late.
- ES** *During the day at the plant, on the day shift, were there that many executives or engineers that would just work days?*
- MM** Yeah, well you would have some engineers on afternoons too cause there is always some problems and they had to be there. But the world revolves around days, the day shift people. Everyone would be more on days. The Plant Manager would be walking around more. People coming from Ford Headquarters coming in looking at things, so they would be walking around. More comfortable on afternoons. Everything was more hectic if the big wigs were always soon to be there.
- ES** *Back in that 1974-1976, the industry was going pretty strong? The demand was pretty strong?*
- MM** It was strong. All that plant use to do at Wixom—it was the bread and butter plant, it was a money plant. We were on overtime all the time. We were working 10 hour days and Saturdays. There were days at the end of the week on a Friday night, I would be so tired I could have slept in the locker room.
- ES** *Really?*
- MM** Yes, I was so tired. On those hours, on a 10-hour schedule, you were coming in at 5:30 start and leaving at 4:00 in the morning. Saturday was a 8-hour day. That was like half a day for us. You would come in and work 3:30 to midnight. You out at midnight and that was half a day. Those days would zip right by. Once you got out of work Friday night at 4:00, by the time you got home and got to bed, bam! You'd be getting up. You are tired. There has just been times on Friday night, I know I had to work Saturday, there's this time that working 10 hours all week the line breaks you don't.
- ES** *The afternoon shift then was five o'clock to four o'clock?*
- MM** 5:30 pm to 4:00 in the morning. That plant really wasn't an eight-hour plant. Near the end it was. Basically my whole time there it was an overtime plant and the overtime hours were 5:30 to 4 in the morning. That's when that plant usually ran, cause the Town Car was the bread and butter. Every time you sold a Town Car they were making probably \$15-\$20 thousand profits. They would close other plants down to bring their parts to us.
- ES** *Ya'll knew that? People talked about that? That was probably one of the most profitable plants around? And it was generally well known?*
- MM** Oh yeah, that was their bread and butter. When we ran out of parts they would close the plant down and keep us running.
- ES** *You had the Crown Victoria's or what was it?*
- MM** We had the Crown Victoria's. We had them there. Those cars were selling for the higher price tag. That's why they were making such a profit. They kept that plant running at all cost.
- ES** *A lot of those became police cars? Did you see them come through?*
- MM** Those cars that came through went to a different area where they got modified for being police cars. I think one time, one of the president's had one of the Town Cars as for one of their limos. That car would come down, but of course they would take it, cause there were other specs for it.
- ES** *Was there a limo line?*
- MM** No, there wasn't a limo line, but it came down in a couple of parts. It was so big and it

- was the president's limo. We did the basic stuff on it.
- ES** *The Lincoln Limo came down the same line?*
- MM** Yes, but that was for the president's car, like Obama has the beast with the shield and armour on it. We would do the basic part and they would take it, whoever, CIA or someone to put on the steel and stuff. Then we had celebrity cars who'd buy it. I couldn't tell you who. We even had a couple of them come down on the day shift. When the car ran off the final line, they came in.
- ES** *Just for a customized car?*
- MM** Yeah, they came in. Probably just for a photo opp or something. We had some stars if you want to call them that, come in and get their car. "Oh yeah, this car is being made for so and so."
- ES** *Did they give that car special attention? The other fellows on the line.*
- MM** Yeah, they shouldn't. Every car should be built the same like any car. Yeah, they probably got a little more careful with that car.
- ES** *Most of your time was on the standard Lincoln Town Car, seems to me from what you said. So how many of those would you see an hour?*
- MM** All day long, we would see them. They would run 400 Town Cars a day, or so.
- ES** *So that would be like 50 an hour. Every minute you are putting an air conditioner in or something?*
- MM** Back in 1974-1976, quality wasn't such an issue. Japan hadn't entered the market yet, so it was pretty much the Big Three. The quality was nothing like it is today. Bam! You had enough time to put you a part on and put four or five nuts and you were off to the next car. We were the only boys in time. Quality issue caught up with us. You would run a good 50 an hour and sometimes if they speeded the line, you could be doing 55 an hour. You would have different car things, like a Town Car. They could maybe run three Town Cars, a Continental, another couple Town Cars, and a couple more Continentals.
- ES** *Some people did the exact same job?*
- MM** Same thing. Everybody, you had had one job and that's what you did. If you put in a steering column, that's what you did every car. Maybe look at it and see about the color or something. Or like me with the A/C, got the A/C and put it on. Someone had the brake thing. You put the same brake in. Grab it, get in there and put the same brake in.
- ES** *From year to year, it didn't change much?*
- MM** No.
- ES** *Some minor changes, or the "changeover" in the summer?*
- MM** Yes the change over and summer time. Seemed like we got more time off in the 1970's. We would get like a month off for changeovers. Then they came down where there was not much going on, basically you would just take off, get a couple weeks. A lot of it would be everybody taking a summer vacation at the same time. Seems like we got more time off in my early part of my career when shut down came. There was some maybe small changes of things, part-wise.
- ES** *When you came back to work in July, you might find yourself putting on a different part or training on something?*
- MM** No, it would be the same part. You would be doing the same thing. Maybe the part got a little smaller, but it was basically the same thing. Just came back and never lost anything or wasn't changed that much where you needed to be trained.
- ES** *Did people get promoted from being on the line to becoming a foreman? How did all that work?*
- MM** I had many friends where we all started out hired on the line and some did become supervisors. There was always seniority going to be in the union. They always went by seniority. They had job postings all over and you could sign up for postings and you had the seniority and you could leave that job and move off to that job that you qualified for

and signed up for. Some of the people went into the management part. They had a list where you could be a supervisor. Once in awhile they would hire people. I had a few friends that worked the line and ended up being supervisors. You could advance. They always had postings for different jobs that came up. You could sign up for them. I signed up for a lot of things, I never got them, because I didn't have the seniority. People were looking to get off the line. The line was tough. They had a hi-low driver open or something, people would sign up to be a hi-low driver, because you'd be free off the line. Basically, you just turn your mind off and turn into a robot.

ES *If you've been on the line 9, 10, 12 years or something, then you got seniority on the line. If you bid for another job, would you go to the bottom of that seniority list or would you maintain your seniority in the new job?*

MM I'd have to say, your seniority would follow you.

ES *So it's plant seniority?*

MM Yes, plant seniority. Plant seniority was kind of the trump card. You could have had somebody coming from a different plant that might have had more seniority than you overall in the Ford Motor Company. But at that plant you would hold the trump card because you hold more seniority at Wixom Plant than he did.

ES *That was Local 36?*

MM Yes, Local 36 was their union number.

ES *Did you go to the meetings? Were you active?*

MM Not really. I went to maybe a handful of meetings. Those things were just drinking kind of things. Bunch of yelling.

ES *Sometimes there were issues and sometimes not?*

MM They would just tell you about what's going on and somebody would be yakking about something. That wasn't worthwhile to me.

ES *Did you have a Steward, Committeeman?*

MM Yes, you had a Committeeman. They always ran for election every couple of years, two to three years or something. A lot of people would joke around, "Must be election time, we are seeing our Committeeman."

ES *Did the Committeeman get a better job?*

MM Oh yeah, Committeeman would be a good job, for the fact you are not working on the line. You are representing people in your area. Different Committeemen for different areas. You might have one Committeeman who would have line one, two and three or that area, which would be a good job, cause you are not working the line everyday, you are walking around. You could be in the union room, the office or stuff.

ES *You got a little desk?*

MM Yes, you got your little desk and your foreign stuff with your air conditioning.

ES *Air conditioning. Smoke when you wanted to?*

MM Yeah, yeah. You had more free time. You aren't at the line; you have more time for that stuff.

ES *Those guys are the ones whose main function was intermediary?*

MM If I had a problem with my supervisor. He's telling me to do something or we aren't getting it done, or they are adding this to your job or you need to do this or something like that. I'd say, "OK, get my Committeeman." They would call the committee room and get the Committeeman. He would come out. Whoever was suppose to take care of that area. He would talk to the supervisor and see what was going on. Anytime you needed him, he would come out and talk to the supervisor. If not, he would go talk to his boss. Being a Committeeman was good. So when that came up, you always had two or three people running against them. People wanted that job.

ES *To you as a worker, having that intermediary was good, bad, or indifferent?*

MM It was good. Like I said when I was in paint, that guy wasn't going to give me gloves to

do my job properly. I had to get my union rep to come over to get some gloves for me. The in between the buffer kind of thing. Same thing, if that guy thought you weren't doing your job the right way, he would call your union guy and have him talk to you to see what was wrong. It was a good thing that they were walking around on the floor. Making sure that the management kind of kept their end of the bargain. It was all useful for them to be around.

ES *Did you have conflict and issue like that where somebody's job was at stake or they weren't doing a job or you would see incidences of people coming in on drugs? You don't have to answer if you don't want to. Just curious. Those are kind of serious things and was the union able to help them out or how did that work?*

MM There were people who came in and they could have been drinking or smoking, whatever their case may be. They would be taken to the hospital to draw for blood samples or to tell if they were drunk or blow into the thing. They would get help. It's kind of hard to get rid of somebody, once you are in the union. You had the union to protect you. It was awful hard to get fired. Pretty much only way you would get fired quickly, was if you got caught stealing. You were gone that day. After awhile they would get you back in anyways. If you were a bad worker or missed a lot of time, it was tough to get rid of you cause of the union. I saw people all the time, "Oh they took off so and so, he got busted for this or that." He'd go to Labor Relations. They would give them a month off or something and the union guy would be fighting for you.

ES *All in all the union representation did a good job to protect those jobs.*

MM Yes, they did. The only way you could lose your job is if you got caught stealing. Anything else, your union was there to help you get help if you get into treatment if you needed it and stuff like that. They kept your job pretty secure.

ES *How was the safety in the plant?*

MM I think you can give credit to the union there too for making it a safe environment to work in. I never felt like if I went into work, I wasn't coming out again. We had a couple deaths out there. One was in the body shop, they were more in an area where they weren't suppose to be. They got in to some kind of situation where he got trapped in a crusher. He got crushed. Of course, they really locked down safety there. Mostly from being in the wrong place. The union was big on safety and making it a safe place to work.

ES *It wasn't just the union, did Ford have an initiative on it?*

MM The union and the company would work together. You need both sides. If they wanted to improve quality or safer environment or this or that, they had to work as management and union together. See eye to eye on these things to make it better. It takes both parties.

ES *Wasn't there like a general UAW contract? How did all that work?*

MM You had your Local 36 agreement with the Wixom plant. Had an overall master contract where the big UAW and Ford would meet. The local union had issues too.

ES *So there was like a Addendum to the Master Agreement?*

MM The master was probably more pay raises or vacation time or bonuses or stuff like that. Issues like that. The Local 36 and Wixom would have, we need more or want something in the cafeteria or plant things where the Local 36 could just talk to us. Never things we were going to strike over. Just common things.

ES *As I remember it, the Master agreement would shift from GM to Ford to Chrysler.*

MM Say they hate Ford first, so they would get Ford's agreement and they would try to take it to the other two companies and try to get the similar things. The UAW might hit Ford cause they know they could probably get more increase in pay, cause Ford was doing well at the time. They could maybe get that increase. So they would try to get whatever they got from Ford's increase and kind of shove it down on GM and Chrysler.

ES *So the rates within Ford for someone on the assembly line, was the same throughout the entire UAW or just through the Region?*

- MM** If it was a National contract thing, the pay scale would be every plant. You might make different money, if I was plugging in a wire. I might get 20 cents more cause I'm doing electrical. If the base pay is \$15.00 an hour if you're a line worker and that would be throughout the whole plant.
- ES** *Taurus or something in Georgia was a UAW plant, they would they make the same thing as a UAW worker up here?*
- MM** I don't know.
- ES** *Let's just say the River Rouge plant and Wixom plant are doing the same similar kind of job?*
- MM** Yes, they would be at the same pay scale.
- ES** *GM and Ford would make the same too?*
- MM** Yes, their pay scale would be the same as hours. Like when they got that deal from Ford they usually try to get it for others.
- ES** *In those days was Ford more successful financially?*
- MM** Oh yes. I was happy to get into Ford. Seemed like GM always had lay-offs and Chrysler always had problems. Ford seemed like they were a lot more steadier. You seemed safer at your job to me. I always thank that I got into Ford. I thought that was the best place. It always seemed like the others had a lot of problems.
- ES** *You seemed real lucky then? How did you get the job? Today a job like that, would have thousands of people lined up to that job.*
- MM** I got lucky. It was the time in 1973 and 1974 where you know it was not like today. You had people that had jobs. My mom was going out with some vendor that worked out at Wixom. He said Wixom was hiring. So we just went out there, filled out an application and got a call and here we go, we are working. That's how it worked back then. You don't have a thousand people trying for five jobs. Back then they had the jobs and people would come in and they would get the jobs. Of course, you are talking 40 years ago. The economy was different back then.
- ES** *Let me just ask you about that. We talked a lot about the 1970's, etc. How did it change from the late 1970's to the time in 2006 when you retired? Tell me about changes?*
- MM** Robotics came in. More technology started. Everybody was getting wiser on technology. Having robots go to the body shop where people would be having difficulty to do a job. They were strenuous jobs. Technology improved and they got these robot arms working in the plants now. Robot all over the place. When technology started going up, technology started changing things at a plant. Bad thing is it cut down the work force number. Had the robots taking somebody's job. Everything was seeming more technical and more easier to put things in. Wasn't so much clutter, the car was being all technology now. The quality crunch came in and it was all about quality, quality, quality. With technology coming in it seemed like it took less people.
- ES** *Maybe they took the more complicated people jobs and converted them to machines?*
- MM** Yes, I would say that. The tougher jobs where the people's bodies would break down. Working in there was tough. Maybe they got more productivity from robots and they were probably doing a better job, they are programmed to hit welds and all these things in the body shop. There was probably better quality that way.
- ES** *Did you feel that the hiring was then slower or were they actually laying people off, by seniority or both?*
- MM** They weren't hiring as much. If anything you were probably getting more people laid off, transfers for different plant. They were trying to hop around to different plants to sign up for different plants to go to. Seemed like it was downsizing. The Wixom Plant at one time when I first hired in probably in 1974 had five or six thousand people working. The time I left that place, probably 1,500.
- ES** *Really?*

- MM** Went from a plant of five or six thousand people working for years and years and by the time I left probably 1,500.
- ES** *Would you say that was a combination of both automation and demand? Those two things together?*
- MM** Yes, I would say so.
- ES** *Because they were selling more Lexus and Toyotas?*
- MM** Those cars came in, the quality of the car and more people going that way. At the time when we got in there it was 10 hours, six days a week.
- ES** *That's a lot of work.*
- MM** Yes, that's a lot of work. We had nice paychecks. Then when we went down to 40 hours, you thought you were broke. If you were smart with your money and took that overtime and rolled it in to something and banked it, then that was good. People live check to check. When you are working 70 hours a week, you are basing your life style on 70 hours a week. Then bam! All of a sudden you go to 40 hours, you're thinking, "Oh my God, I'm broke. I can't live on 40 hours now." That was for so long, by the time I left there, I don't think we hardly worked any overtime for years. We weren't even getting eight hours at the time. By the time I got out too, they were closing the plant.
- ES** *What did the rank and file guys, what was their common thought about the industry in general? You know, Japanese and German auto makers and quality and robotics and demand and the economy and the whole thing. What were their common views of the industry from your perspective?*
- MM** We disliked the Japanese and the Toyota coming in. We were kind of questioning how they could flood our market, but we couldn't get into theirs. That ruffled some feathers. They were just coming all over here and costing our jobs and people losing their jobs and stuff. There was resentment. You would have people come in with a foreign nameplate. Their cars were scratched up, tires flatten and stuff like that. If Ford's paying my lifestyle, I'm going to have to drive a Ford. It just made sense to me. Although, when I was younger and got hired in, I did drive a GM. I had a GM Formula, but then I kind of wised up that Ford was my livelihood.
- ES** *Plus you got deals?*
- MM** Right, I need to support Ford. You got discounts, some thousands knocked off it, cause you worked at Ford. But yeah, I think there was some resentment towards it.
- ES** *Was there resentment towards the Japanese lets say, or towards management, or for the government for not controlling the tariffs? Or all of that.*
- MM** You could probably put all that in there. We sat around some and talked, "The government should do, why the government does this, why we got to get our quality better, why don't they slow down the lines."
- ES** *Everyone had their own opinion?*
- MM** Yeah, I guess. People would be all over the board on their opinion. Everyone would have their own.
- ES** *What was the worst times?*
- MM** I got laid off in 1980 for three years. Thankfully, things picked up and I got put on the second shift again and got called back.
- ES** *You didn't have that much seniority at that time? Laid off for three years?*
- MM** Not at that time. I had to find a different job.
- ES** *Did you keep in touch with the Local? Is that how that worked.*
- MM** Well you did. You kind of listened. You had other people laid off and you would talk to them and they would say what they heard. "Yea, yea, they might be putting that second shift back on at Wixom." After three years it came about. That was probably the toughest time.
- ES** *What was the reason for that?*

- MM** 1980, what was the reason? Well, probably.
- ES** Fuel prices and the demand for cars?
- MM** Yes, that had to be. The big thing came in 1973 and 1974 when they had the big line-ups for gas. Maybe it was something to do with the fuel and a lot of cars were junk and everybody was buying more imports.
- ES** *I remember I bought a Honda. Honda's hit the market in 1979 or 1980. They had a 50 mpg Honda. That might have been a contributor.*
- MM** Definitely we got laid off, cause we weren't selling cars. Probably had to do with the gas prices and imports taking over the market. They didn't have the car sales. You don't have the car sales, you can't run a second shift.
- ES** *But when they started calling back, they called back the people on the list? That was because your union. It looked out for you. Another industry that's not unionized, you might or might not have gotten called back.*
- MM** The union made them obligated to call us back and not to hire anyone before you hired these guys back. The union helped. Non-union, maybe you got called back, maybe you didn't. The union made sure they called back the people they had to call back first. I went back to my same job, putting in A/C. They knew the job we were on when you left and they put us back on the same job when we came back. We came in and we had to take an orientation. That's how they were starting out, "We are working together now, with the union....." Quality came in and all that stuff. Gave us a week and would say it was different than the last time you were here. I remember this, "Don't expect the Foremen, Supervisor to be putting rose petals and flowers by your job, because you are coming back. It's not like that. It's a different thing, how we are more quality and these guys busted their butts for quality to get you guys back." Basically we went back to the same job putting A/C's in.
- ES** *They didn't have "Welcome Back Mark" on them?*
- MM** No. Just came back and did what you were doing when you left. We had an orientation for a week and then we went back to our jobs. They were trying to show how things had changed in the plants now cause quality was a big issue with the imports.
- ES** *Quality became a big issue?*
- MM** That was a big part. People were buying imports because of quality. That started turning the Big Three into quality conscious now.
- ES** *Did you still feel Ford was the premiere brand of the Big Three?.*
- MM** To me I did. I always will think so. Of course I could be biased because I worked there for 32.3 years. I went by that, because I had my three year down time. But other than that I worked steady.
- ES** *So that was your only lay-off?*
- MM** Only lay-off was that three year stint. That was it. I worked steady the whole time I was at Wixom and Ford.
- ES** *You didn't get paid while you were laid off? You had to do some other work?*
- MM** Yeah, I had to do some other work. I think at that time, they had some kind of SUB pay. We got a big check for five grand cause we got laid off cause they put it down under some foreign reason we got laid off, we got a \$5,000 check and training, TRA passed and we got that. For the first good year and a half we were making good money doing nothing. Me and my brother would go out and play tennis for six hours.
- ES** *To some extent, the first year it was like a paid vacation.*
- MM** Yeah, cause we had our SUB pay and we were making about 85 or 90% of our pay. Plus this TRA thing came in we got a lump sum of money or you could go for training. So this was alright. Then some people would say that's because of the union. Then you have some that don't like unions saying, "They shouldn't be getting all that stuff. Why should they get laid off for a year or more and get that kind of money? I get laid off and I don't

have anything.”

ES *But you didn't have your health insurance or any of those benefits?*

MM No.

ES *So you had to get another job?*

MM Yes, eventually. I was making at Ford and what I ended up making at the other places were peanuts. I had to live with three different guys cause I wasn't making anything and share expenses.

ES *You really weren't sure you'd get called back?*

MM There was no guarantee. The economy had to pick up.

ES *Now you know looking back.*

MM You didn't know at that time. I didn't know I was ever going back to Ford. We would talk and I'd keep in touch and hang out with other people I used to work with at Ford. They were laid off. We'd kind of get together and talk like have you heard anything? But we had no guarantee we were going back.

ES *Then you came back in 1983. Pretty much same old same old for all those years. We were talking about the changes.*

MM They were more quality conscious and they were putting in more guns and stuff, torquing at the right thing so you wouldn't break off the nut. The gun knew what to do, etc. A lot more quality tools and equipment at that time. It was different. You could stop the line. If you had a problem, they had the red buttons out now. Boom, you could stop the line.

ES *Before that, the workers couldn't stop the line. After that if a worker saw something that was out of quality, they could stop the whole line?*

MM Yes, the whole line. If I was on line one and I hit that line, the whole line would stop.

ES *That put a lot more pressure on the Foreman.*

MM Oh yeah, they came running down. They saw that light, you thought they were track stars they'd come running down and they'd be flipping that thing on and saying, “What's wrong?” They don't want that off. When you hit that thing, it would be on a piece of paper and somebody had to take account for it. “What's the problem here? How come light number three has been on ten times today?”

ES *Sometimes they had to reengineer the jobs?*

MM They had people in there to counting your steps. They wanted to see you make your job efficient. They set up your tools and your hardware. They had it all set up and they were counting your steps for the easiest way to do that job and the less steps it took. They are doing all kinds of things to make the quality better then.

ES *So that was a major change? From then until the time you retired any other major..?*

MM The thing was true with contracting. They wanted everybody to know more jobs. Where you could be replaceable in a different area, they could plug you into over here. A lot of people didn't like that cause they didn't like your cheese being moved. They had a thing about your cheese being moved. They had a film on and everyone had to go watch it. I like doing one job. I know how to do it and I do it good. I don't want to learn another job.

ES *That gave them more efficiency. Instead of having 400 people on the shift they could have 380 because if they need help here, they could move somebody around?*

MM Their goal was to break the monotony of it. The first brick you would do this job, then after that brick you might do this job.

ES *That might give more quality, because you are more focused.*

MM Instead of a tag relief, everyone went down on a break at the same time. A tag relief was when the relief man would come up and say you have thirty minutes and they would cover your job. That was the old way. Having men come in and giving you a relief. He couldn't do as good a job as you could. So that might have affected quality. When we came back, they got rid of tag relief and we all went down at the same time. “OK, its 7:00, break time.” The whole Trim shop went down on brake at the same time. They had

a half hour first break, half hour lunch and depending on how long you were working you would get a half hour or 18 minutes or whatever for the last break. For the first thirty minutes, the line would go down, say 7:00. Trim shop would go down and everyone would be on break. That way they don't have to worry about guys doing the job and the job not getting done as good.

ES Did they have some kind of buzzard giving you a one minute warning?

MM No, line went down. 7:00 came around the line stopped. No warning. If the line was going at 7:30, it went on at 7:30, you better be there.

ES Did they not give you a warning?

MM No. You knew your time was 7:30 that line was going on.

ES Otherwise you'd be 10 stations up.

MM Oh yeah, that happened, you don't stop the line. When you got a half hour break and that thing went on at 7:30, it went on at 7:30. That's what I mean. You had to be there.

ES What was the common feeling among your peers, toward the UAW and the whole structure.

MM The fight on the bridge, way back when with Henry Ford. The union came in and it was a big help. Especially back then, Holy Toledo, when they first started these things, pretty much had to lift up these engines themselves. You had to get 8 guys.

ES If you couldn't do it, they'd get somebody else.

MM The union came in and it did help jobs, safety, creating a new ways of doing things and a money structure, keeping your jobs and not being able to get rid of someone. I think we got a lot of benefits from the UAW. Maybe it did hurt at some occasions, but the majority of times it was a good thing. Maybe you had some people who thought they were entitled to make more money. When the pay scale got up and we were making \$25 or \$26 an hour, that's a lot of money for not being educated or had a skill making that kind of money. You were making more money than people with college degrees. Some people thought when they saw these bonuses the executive got, they thought they were entitled to make more money. It had to stop. We could not keep making the money we were making an hour. We were making good money. Going up more and more. Can't keep going this way, cause it's not going to be profitable for the company. If it's not profitable for the company, we are going to lose our jobs.

ES The last 10 years of your career was seeing it go down to 1,500 people. The comments there were notions you lost to Ford competition and technology.

MM Technology where you didn't need as many people to work on the car like you would have in the past. So there was a combination of things, how it got from 6,000 to 1,500.

ES You retired before they closed the plant?

MM I knew they were going to close and I didn't want to go to another plant. I had enough seniority to go to another plant, but it was the time too where people didn't want other people coming to other plants and I didn't want to go through that.

ES 32 years?

MM I was ready to go anyways. They had a buy-out period. I was fortunate I get in at the Ford Motor Company at the right time and I got out at the right time. I had enough time where I had my 32 years. I could get out my pension cause I was over the 30 year mark. Since I was 32 years I could get my pension, I could get the buy-out.

ES So you got cash buy-out? Which you got Pension for life.

MM Cash buy-out. Pension for life as long as Ford Motor Company is in business.

ES Technically through U.S. laws there is a pension guarantee and then you will get social security when get that age. That won't reduce your pension will it?

MM When you get 62, a portion falls off where Ford don't pay. So you have to sign up for social security.

ES Is that part of your buy-out.

MM No, that's just part of how it is for the pensions at Ford.

ES *What about health care?*

MM Health care you still got, but you pay more, more and more.

ES *You pay part of it? Do they deduct it from your pension check?*

MM No, just when I go in to see the doctor, I have to pay more and more out of my pocket.

ES *They don't deduct anything from your pension check. But you have a bigger co-pay. Will you keep that after you get Medicare?*

MM I don't know. I would have to find out more from social security. I have gotten to that point yet. So when I'm 62, then I go on social security. Cause Ford is going to stop paying a portion.

ES *My dad I think is a Teamster. I think they got a better deal.*

MM They do. That gets added on, nothing gets taken away from their Teamster pension. When he got social security that added on. But ours dropped. Ford drops off \$600. Teamster just adds that on, like they got a raise.

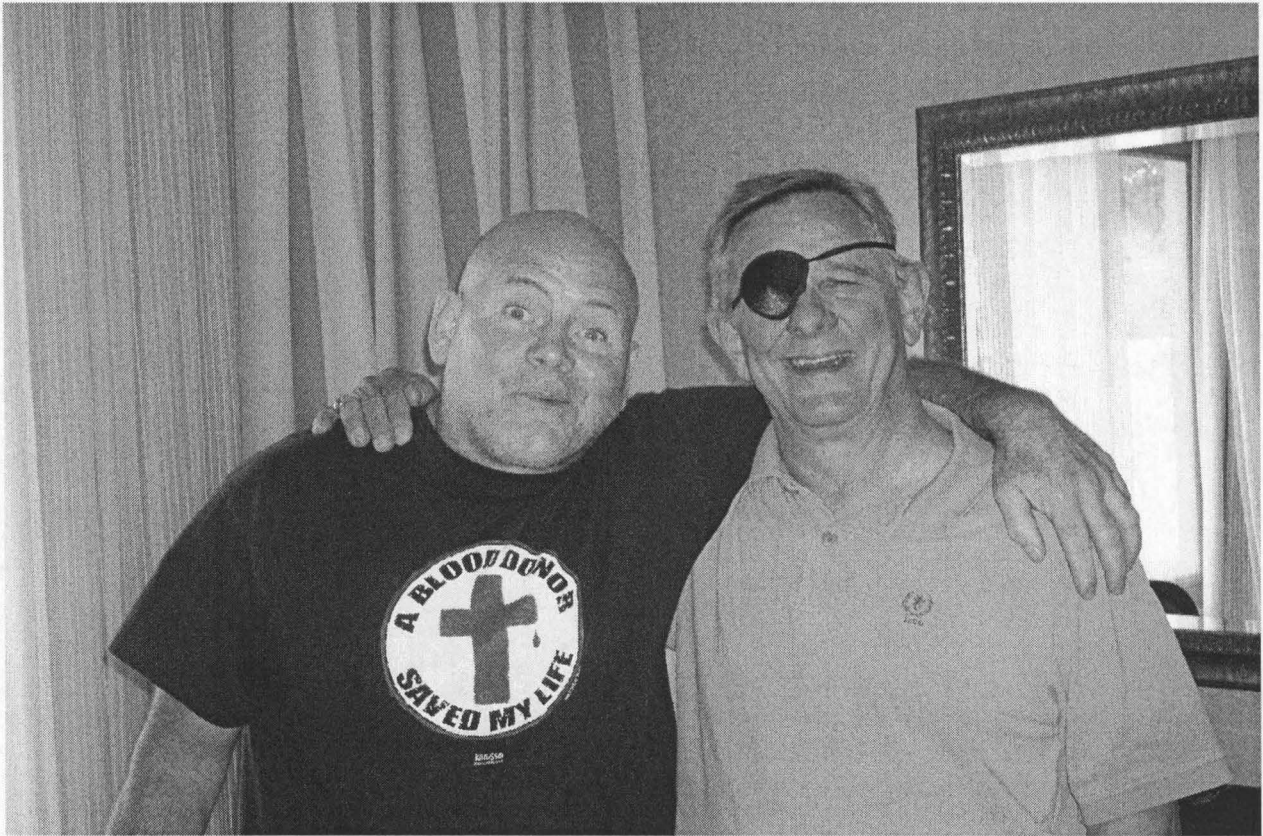
ES *He got a pretty sweet deal. He worked two Teamster jobs. When the first company went out of business, he was out like you, for a long period of time. Then he got another one. Together, combined he might have had thirty years. He still drawing that pension. He's 85.*

MM Ever since I retired, every Christmas we got a \$700 check. This year, we were renegotiating our contract and they took that away. It was the first year we haven't had it.

ES *I think you guys fared a lot better than GM too.*

MM GM went through bankrupt. I don't know how that affected pensions and all that stuff. I'm lucky that's when they are apart. With Ford staying afloat and made some good decisions and stuff it didn't affect my pension. I was lucky. The good Lord got me into Ford. That was the best place I could be.

ES *It's Mark H. Murray. May 31, 2012. We are talking 1974 to 2006 Ford UAW, worked one plant Wixom plant. I appreciated you taking the time. [Researcher ends interview]*



Retired Ford UAW assembly line auto worker, Mark Murray (L) with researchers Edward Savela, May 31, 2012.



The Ford Wixom Plant. In its heyday it employed approximately 6,000 and this parking lot was full. The plant closed in 2007.