

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, June 20, 2012

*On June 20, 2012, Edward Savela met with retired UAW skilled tradesman, Andy Warmack. Mr. Warmack worked his way from the assembly line, through the apprenticeship program, and became a journeyman pipefitter, retiring from General Motors after 35 years. This interview took place at the Doubletree Hotel in Novi, Michigan on June 20, 2012.*

*ES [After initial introductions, the researcher begins] Andy, so you have work for GM for how long?*

**AW** I hired in, in July of 1973. Hired into production and was lucky enough to get on a machine. It was actually a manufacturing facility as apposed to an assembly plant. In fact it was called Gear & Axle. The names actually changed from Detroit Gear & Axle to Chevrolet Gear & Axle to Saginaw Steering Gear. We never changed what we did.

*ES The differentiation is you were making parts & components.*

**AW** We were. The assembly lines we did have we assembled axles for trucks and vans, we did the K-Series, like the Blazer would be considered a K-Series. We did the axles front and rear for all of the pickup trucks all the way up through the One-Tons or the Dually's. The assembly lines were actually axle assembly lines. The rest of it we actually got the raw castings in from the foundries and we machined parts. The job I had at first was, the machine was called a Bullard and it had eight stations in it and I would take a line that would come by with hooks on it and the hub. Just the hub would come by and that was my part and I would pull it off the raw stock, completely off the raw stock and finish the sides and all. Throw it in that Bullard and it would finish one side and when the station came back around, I would flip it over and put it in the other one. Each station had two chucks. So basically that's what I did. Put in a rough part with the eight stations with two chucks, each stations...

*ES These are GM axles?*

**AW** Yes, absolutely.

*ES There are other suppliers like Borg Warner & ZF and so on that are suppliers to General Motors.*

**AW** Yes, the only other name that I can remember that came up a lot was Dana.

*ES Dana, ok.*

**AW** Dana Manufacturing and we had a couple of their axles in there to compare with the stuff that we did. It was actually a pretty tough looking axle. Pretty heavy-duty stuff. But they were from what I remember their main source for the One Tons, which was the heavier duty like the 3500 pickup trucks, 3500 series and the dually's. The General Motors, pretty much from a ½ ton and ¾ of the 1500 and the 2500 we pretty much did that 100%. I want to say 95%.

*ES So all your stuff was truck related really?*

**AW** Yeah trucks, Blazer, the vans, full size vans, and when the Astro Van came out I don't remember what year it was, they brought in some new machinery and we did the front and rear axles for that. Cause they also had a four-wheel drive, I don't know if you'll remember them. They had four-wheel drive axles, like a four-wheel drive minivan. That was their business.

*ES So, from 1973 for how many years would you say...*

**AW** I want to say 14 years, maybe 11 years, 1973 till I got my apprenticeship in 1984. That

whole time, most of that time, I worked on that same Bullard. I did move around to different departments. Worked on a couple lines temporarily, like if someone was missing or something I would go fill in.

**ES** *What's a Bullard?*

**AW** It's just the name of the machine. The Bullard complimenting itself actually made a couple different machines and made was called a Template Term, which also it did a different job, but on the same halt it would do a different job on it. But it was just a Bullard, we just called it a Bullard. The big one with the eight stations like I ran, we called it a Bullard, the other ones were called Template Terms made by Bullard. So then I got in the trades, did my apprenticeship.

**ES** *So was there some degree of monotony in that?*

**AW** Absolutely. We had to run I believe, it was like 450 parts a day, was more or less the quota. Anything above and beyond that was gravy as far as they were concerned. We had these little gauges, we called them snap gauges. We have to check every 10 parts, and we had to go over the whole part of these snap gauges. That's the way we could tell if the toolings were getting worn out, and we'd have to go in there and change tooling. Pretty monotonous job.

**ES** *Good Foreman? Lot of Foremen? Treated you well?*

**AW** At the time I had a pretty descent Foreman. We were treated OK. The shop was pretty dirty at that time, there wasn't a lot of safety regulations, this was in the early 1970s. The only safety going on was you had to wear safety glasses when you came in. At the time they didn't require side shields or anything, but you walked in that door you had to have safety glasses on. When I first hired on they actually required steel-toed boots. They kind of backed off on that in later years. But they got down more on the safety glasses. It was one of those things, it seemed to us that they preached it a lot, but they didn't enforce it a lot. All and all it wasn't too bad, the money was good. Got some pretty descent overtime. At that time the economy was, you could still make a living. I mean I still had to be the only person making money at the time and now it's at the point when you have to have both people working.

**ES** *At the time, did your wife stay at home to raise the kids pretty much?*

**AW** Yes she was working at Michigan Bell there for awhile, but yeah I would say she stayed home after our oldest kid was born and after she got a little older, closer to Kindergarten age and in preschool then she went to work part-time.

**ES** *That was a pretty good time for the auto industry? Making money and no lay-offs, at least that period before you got in to the trades?*

**AW** Yeah. No actually it got pretty crappy. In 1973 I hired in. About January 1975 you remember the oil, so called oil crunch? I got laid off for eight months. Didn't know if I was going to be called back or not. But I did eventually.

**ES** *You were too high on the seniority list. That was important?*

**AW** Yeah, they had a lot of people working for them. They only had to go back a couple years to get rid of like 1,000 people, so I want to say that I had heard there were three shift operations going on, cause it was kind of like almost like it was heyday. Early 1970s, 1973-1974 things were pretty gangbusters. Three full shifts in all the plants that were there, they were probably pushing about 8,000 people. And that was just that facility.

**ES** *At that time there were very few if any foreign cars? Iit was before the foreign cars?*

**AW** Yeah, once in awhile, you remember we would see a Volkswagen, Volkswagen VW, that was a foreign car. Every once in awhile you might see a Toyota Celica, you might see one of them once in a while. Yeah, everybody was pretty much driving American cars. But then that so called oil crunch hit and the bottom fell off. Before that we were working like seven-twelves of production trying to keep up with demand.



**ES** 7 days, 12 hours a day?

**AW** Yes.

**ES** *Wow, you were making a ton of money for the day. Did that kind of took a toll on you, wear you out? Get boring, monotonous?*

**AW** Well, my marriage suffered a little bit. Gone all the time, getting up early, come home, cut the grass, go to bed, cut the grass, eat dinner, go to bed whichever way it went. Did that for a while. But then I went to work after that for a couple years. I actually got called back out at the Warren plant. Out there for about 30 days, after the eight month lay-off. Then I got called back at Gear & Axle in Detroit. I want to say I worked about 3 or 4 more years, and then I got laid off again for about six months. Went back to work for about a year or so, and then got laid off again for a couple months. About that time, I think I went back to school. Started taking classes and started taking the apprenticeship test, cause you had to keep testing. You could keep testing as long as you'd do better. They would only take your highest score. You could only test once a year. They were testing a lot more back then, than they do now.

**ES** *Because you were laid off, you could do that, taking classes or was that something you would do while you working as well?*

**AW** No, I went to work. They had a tuition assistance plan through the UAW, so they covered the cost of the classes. I don't remember if we lost that while we were laid off or not. I'd have to look back if I have any of the old contracts.

**ES** *When you were laid off, they had SUB pay?*

**AW** We ran out of that the first time we were laid off.

**ES** *It was only like a 6-month deal or 3-month deal or something? You don't remember?*

**AW** They never expected that to happen. They weren't prepared to have that type of a lay-off. They are better prepared now. They were not prepared from what I understand. But that's when, have you heard of the TRA or Trade Readjustment allowance?

**ES** *Little bit. But tell me about it.*

**AW** We got that. Seems to me I got a check for a couple thousand dollars because some of it [Sub Pay] ran out. But we ended up paying it back when we got back to work. We all thought it was strictly a government deal, but apparently General Motors through the government, cut us all that check so we had to pay that back for some reason.

**ES** *Over a period of time?*

**AW** Over a period of time, right. We got it all paid off. I went back to school. I didn't know if I was going to make it in the trades or not. I went back to school and took some classes to prepare myself. I wanted to get into something like robotics or something cause I could see it coming down the road. So I took some robotic classes, some math classes cause I figured I'd need those. I believe I took a basic like a DC electric course which all helped when it came time to take my apprentice test. I took that a couple times. It ended up being where the higher you scored is where you placed on their list to be called.

**ES** *And you could only take the test one time a year?*

**AW** Right.

**ES** *So you had to be ready?*

**AW** Right. I finally ended up number one or number two on the list, for like five years before I got called up.

**ES** *Really?*

**AW** That's how slow things got. Anyway, I got called in. I got three years under the Apprentice Program and then there was a lay-off. Me and a few of the other guys. Three years, it was a four-year program and we were into it three years and then got laid-off. I was laid off for three years out of the Apprentice Program. Then they finally called us back.



- ES* During those three years did you go back to the line?
- AW* I went back to the line. I went back to the assembly line. Being an apprentice they didn't give us a choice and I had prior production time and I had more seniority than the people working the lines, but I didn't have a choice.
- ES* But it was good for you, because at least you had a job?
- AW* Yes, they just kicked me back to the line.
- ES* Unlike some industries and some jobs that lay people off and let people go when things get tough one of the big advantages of the UAW was that they kept your name on the list and when they were calling people back, they were calling seniority wise. Big advantage to being in the union?
- AW* Absolutely. I'm guessing a non-union shop they would just call whoever they wanted.
- ES* Put an ad in the paper and hire new people.
- AW* They could do whatever they wanted. There was definitely some job security there. If you want to talk UAW, I think we lost a lot of our clout when, I don't remember who the President was, but when they started, when they decided we were going to do mini-strikes for the international agreement as opposed to just everybody quits working and shut General Motors down, or Ford, or whoever. We lost all our power.
- ES* In other words, strike at one plant at a time?
- AW* Mini-strikes. So what they would do is, trucks aren't doing so well anyway, so we'll strike the truck plants and any of the plants that have anything to do with the trucks, we'll strike them and let those people live on strike fund while those people did the contract.
- ES* That was almost like helping them?
- AW* Yes, absolutely. It did nothing for the workers. This way the company could keep right on rolling selling their big sellers and "we got a strike going over here, we'll deal with it sometime."
- ES* Is that when years ago I think at one point, when a contract came up for negotiation for Ford, Chrysler or GM at the same time, would they take turns? I seem to remember the union taking turns for Ford's year to be on strike or GM to be on strike or contract negotiations? Or do I have that wrong?
- AW* I wasn't on strike that many times. In all my time at General Motors to tell you the truth I don't remember being on strike, ever. I think the idea was to strike the company first that was the most vulnerable. I think that was their MO. So that way they could get as much as they could out of that contract then they could do the whole "Ford gave us this, ya'll are doing better than Ford..."
- ES* So the pays were very similar.
- AW* Yes, we were probably within 10-15 cents of each other in the pay range.
- ES* One guy had mentioned to me, something about during the Reagan administration when the air traffic controllers went on strike. It sort of was a bad thing for unions in general, because they fired everybody and hired all brand new ones and busted that union. Does that ring a bell for you? Or affect the power of the UAW?
- AW* It did kind of upset me quite a bit, cause I think the government has no business getting into that end of it. I don't remember what Reagan's reasons were exactly for doing that. Certainly was not national security. I mean he had the Army, Navy and Marines. He could have flied anywhere he wanted to fly, so what was he doing with messing with domestic airliners? To me he was just another Republican working for big business. Bottom line, that's how I saw it.
- ES* So you got firmly into studying for electrician or was it pipefitting? Or did it matter? How does all that go? And how many skilled trades are there?
- AW* They try to keep a ratio of skilled trades to the other hourly assemblers. I don't remember how many other assembly people there were, but when I was Committeeman down there,

I want to say there was about 780 skilled trades total. That would be the maintenance people which is the pipefitter, electricians, sheet metal guys, millwrights, then they had the mass mechanic side which was machinery repair, tool makers, dye makers, gauge men, that kind of stuff. We didn't have model makers at our facility. I'm not up to where they would fit in on all that. All totals with all the trades I want to say there was 780 of us at Gear & Axle in Detroit.

*ES And you guys got paid higher? On a separate seniority list?*

*AW Yes, absolutely. We actually had a lines of a demarcation committee, which told us what we could do and what we couldn't do as far as our trade was concerned.*

*ES So you couldn't be a swingman on the line?*

*AW No, the union protected us from that. They said you can't come get the skilled trades people on their down time, cause we did have down time. In fact the whole thing is what the trades used to be, cause if we were sitting on our rear ends, then things were running. And there was quite a bit of truth in that cause they would call us and we would have to get up and go do a job, we had to shut machines down, to get in their parts, so they were down. So they really should have wanted us sitting. Available, we had to be available.*

*ES What would you do when you were sitting?*

*AW Read the paper, do crossword puzzles.*

*ES Is that right?*

*AW Yeah. We would clean up our area. We were allowed to do that. We couldn't go out and sweep isles that was janitor work. We would clean up our area, polish our tools.*

*ES Maybe read up on some new information.*

*AW Yeah, some of the new equipment would come in a lot of the guys would read through the manuals and look through them and see what was going on.*

*ES So that was kind of 1984, 198- ish that you were kind of entrenched in that?*

*AW 1984, 1985, 1986, I was into my apprenticeship, so 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, I was laid off. Then 1990, 1991 I got called back and I was back on my tools. I was basically following a Journeyman around for those 4 years doing what I was told to do. They didn't really turn you lose. They weren't allowed to put you on a job by yourself.*

*ES Until someone signed off?*

*AW Yeah, so many hours of school, had to keep grades up, had to have so many hours in each department and then they would sign off. Then we would go apply for your Journeyman card. It's a good deal.*

*ES It sounds like a good deal. A bit of a deal to reward those committed to learning trades and doing that. So you just got paid more and didn't have to work the line and you got your Journeyman's card?*

*AW I'm a Plumber, Pipefitter and Steamfitter.*

*ES What year did you get that?*

*AW I want to say it was 1985 I got my Journeyman's card. Or 1984. Yeah it's a good deal. I would do it again. I've always like tearing stuff apart with my hands. It was a good job for me.*

*ES So, any stories about big events or as a Committeeman. You became a Committeeman when? You don't have to give exact dates. Were you elected to that job?*

*AW Well, yes. It's a funny story. There was a shop, skilled trade shop representative, and he was kind of over the two. We had two Committeeman. We had a Maintenance Committeeman, which is what I am. I took care of the pipefitters, electricians and sheet metal guys. Then they had Mechanics Committeeman who took care of the other side of the house. So there were two of us. And then the skilled trade Shop Committee person was above them. They were on the Shop Committee. They sat in on all the meetings that were labor related and stuff.*

**ES** *So there was a Head Committeeman that was over the skilled trade? All skilled trades had a Committeeman?*

**AW** Over all the skill trade for the whole complex. So there were two of us and then him at the top over the whole complex. So what happened was the guy at the top, Kenny, he had an aneurysm. He fell out in the floor, dead. They said he was dead before he hit the floor.

**ES** *On the job?*

**AW** While he was out on a call. Then Spike stepped into his spot. So they were short a man. It was like in between years. So he came up and asked me if I wanted to fill in. At that time they could come up to anyone and ask them to fill in. Provided there was no objections among the people. Like if you go to a union meeting and say "we don't want him we want to vote someone in." That never happened so the people accepted me.

**ES** *You were probably younger, I would imagine?*

**AW** 1987, 1988, somewhere around in there. Yeah quite a bit younger, I guess. So poor Spike was walking around with Chris who was the Master Mechanics Committee Person and he just couldn't keep up. He couldn't walk through the plant. So he went in to see his doctor and come to find out he was walking death. He ended up getting a four bypass surgery.

**ES** *Was he an old guy?*

**AW** He was our age.

**ES** *Really?*

**AW** So he stepped up into Kenny's job as the Shop Committeeman over skilled trade shop committee. Then I stepped up into Spike's position. Then when Spike took off for that medical and he was off for a couple years. I stepped up, I never did get elected. But I moved from being an Alternate Committeeman, to being Committeeman to being the Shop Committeeman. It was kind of weird how it all happened. I went through all these stages and never got elected.

**ES** *Really?*

**AW** Yes, I ended up being the Top Dog for the skilled trades. I really didn't want to be there. I wasn't prepared. I didn't have enough time in the local to know all the locals

**ES** *But you were the guy who went to the meetings?*

**AW** I was the guy who went to the meetings. Thank God, that the Shop Chairman was actually one of my journeymen. He was a pipefitter, so he was the skilled-trade person. So I talked to him a lot about what needed to be done and what could be done on my part, on my end of the bargain. Cause I ended up appointing a couple guys too. So basically the whole maintenance side of that union at that place was all never elected for the remainder of that term. We were all appointed.

**ES** *How often do they generally elect?*

**AW** I think it was every 3 years.

**ES** *You had special privileges and all, right? Didn't have to do as much work there?*

**AW** Grievances, you handled grievances. Or you handled disputes. I had to step in on a couple things here and there. At that level if labor relations got involved then I had to get involved. One time a guy got fired and I had to sit in on that and watch that and try to get that guy back. He ended up getting a job. He had just finished his apprentice program and got a caught down the road while he was suppose to be in the shop working. They let him go and they refused to bring him back. I don't know what it was. They wouldn't bring him back.

**ES** *That's probably one of the things.*

**AW** Well, generally after time, I mean you usually got to give stuff up, grievances or something, usually give something up, but they would generally hire people back, under different terms. There's going to be a break in your seniority depending on how long you were terminated for. You may not even get your previous seniority back. You may have



- to start over. It depends on what you negotiate with them.
- ES** *So even in some of the worst situation where they gave you another chance and so on?*
- AW** Yes. I didn't see a lot of it, but I'm sure at times some really important grievances were probably given up to get people back to work. Part of the game I guess.
- ES** *Tick for Tack, kind of trade off?*
- AW** Yes.
- ES** *You don't have to answer this if you don't want to. If some people were more popular or more respected than others they may get their job back rather than someone who was known as a troublemaker anyway, might they trade that off on something like that?*
- AW** Sometimes it seemed, and a lot of times people bitched about it, it seemed like sometimes the trouble makers would get fired and they would have to give up a bunch of crap to get them back. And people bitched about that. I kind of don't blame them. When you have to work with someone who causes more grief. Some people would gripe about your boss and now he's your coworker. Not that you want to see anybody lose their job.
- ES** *You had some better apples than other apples.*
- AW** Absolutely, you got that anywhere you go.
- ES** *Let me ask you this, a recent book I read on this, talked a lot about race relations and talked about way before your time when we were still in grade school there was discrimination in the shops, but that it improved over time. This author made a point of talking about skilled trades being very difficult for African Americans*
- AW** I have a couple things to say about that. One of them is when it came time to call me up for my apprentice program and I was like one or two on the list and they had basically jumped over me on the list, because at the last minute there was a couple black girls and a couple black guys that got in there.
- ES** *So there was some affirmative action going on?*
- AW** Yes, affirmative action going on, which really kind of pissed me off. I really just about went across the desk on one of our Apprentice Coordinators on our union side. Basically saying, "Look I've been sitting on this list for five years waiting and now at the very last minute, you are going to come tell me that you are jumping the list with these other people. I used to go ask them. Even though things were tough, at least once every couple months, I would go ask them, "where am I on the list?" So it wasn't like he had put these people in front of me because they were asking or previously. Which is what he should've done. He could've explained it me then. But no what they did, they put them up there at the time they called us up for apprentice.
- ES** *That had to sting a bit.*
- AW** I got my apprenticeship after that. Because I made an issue out of it. So I don't know if that's what caused it or they really decided that they needed one more pipefitter or what, I'm not sure.
- ES** *Well, they still let the other two in that were on there?*
- AW** Yeah, they still let them on it. Yeah, I was hot. You working an assembly line or working your machine doing that job, that monotonous job day in day out, just wishing and hoping and praying for five years that that apprenticeship would show up and then they come and tell you that at the last minute. The rumors would fly through the shop. "Hey they're putting on an apprentice" and then you go down there. After five years of being on top of that list, you go down there and find out they jumped the list. I don't care what their reasons were. I was pretty upset.
- ES** *Sure, understandable.*
- AW** So I let them know that I was upset. I didn't like the way they were handling things. Cause they hadn't tested in a while and I know that I had asked him before or since the last test, where I stood on the list. And I was still number one or two. I think I was

number two. Number two for electrician and number one for pipefitter and then have them tell me they had to jump me on the list.

*ES But you still got it.*

*AW I did get it, yes. And then everything was good from then on out.*

*ES Now was that a management thing you think or was it a union thing?*

*AW I think they [management] probably told him that. The affirmative action act was in place at the time and I sort of understood the affirmative action program, but I didn't see and I still don't understand why somebody of a different nationality should go ahead of you just because of your nationality. On the other hand, you should absolutely not be discriminated against. And if there comes to where your Black or Mexican and I'm Irish or Jewish we have the exact same score and you need more Irish than you do Jewish, than take the Irish kind. If everything else is equal, then take the Irish kind. That could be the deciding factor.*

*ES But in your case, at the end of the day, it really didn't matter. You raised the issue and got the job.*

*AW Just the way they handled it was just bad. That last minute bull was ridiculous. The Affirmative Action was in place. They should have moved those people up a long time ago and said this is where you place on the list and some people placed ahead of you, we can't do anything about it. Don't come in at the last minute and say, "hey your Irish so you are going to the front of the list." "Or your black" or whatever it is they are looking for.*

*ES So what local union was this?*

*AW 235*

*ES 235*

*AW It's no longer there. But I'm pretty sure they were all handled the same.*

*ES But then things got pretty good for you. You stayed the top Committeeman. You stayed the top Committeeman for the rest of your career.*

*AW Oh no. It was funny cause I got re-elected once. I did run and I got re-elected. But just as Committeeman. I didn't run for the Shop Committeeman. Someone else got that job. Then the elections were rolling around again. Right about that time or just before that, American Axle came in and bought the place from General Motors. We all had the option to go to other plants. So I had put my name in, that's how I ended up at Truck and Bus. So I opted to not run for reelection, because my plan was to get out of there and I was pretty sure I was going to get transferred cause a Pipefitter was a pretty reliable trade in the other GM locations.*

*ES O.K., just so we know, the first group of plants were exactly where?*

*AW Where I did my apprenticeship was Gear & Axle in Detroit on Holbrook in 1975.*

*ES Then you transferred?*

*AW After American Axle bought General Motors out I immediately applied to transfer to another GM facility. About two and a half years later I got picked up at GM Pontiac Assembly. Right there on Updyke and Square Lake Road, which is no longer there.*

*ES The two and a half years, what did you do in the meantime?*

*AW I worked for American Axle as a Pipefitter. That's actually where I get a portion of my retirement from. A portion of my pension is from American Axle.*

*ES Really?*

*AW Yeah. Two and a half years of my pension.*

*ES That was actually UAW, so it really didn't matter?*

*AW It all counted. It was all part of my 35 years.*

*ES O.K., But they are not around anymore, American Axle?*

*AW No, they ended up selling out from what I understand, the last contract that came up, the*

first couple ones, they pretty much kept up with the Big Three, but the last one, they told the people, "this is what I'm going to give you or I'm selling the place and moving out of the country. Taking my business out of the country."

*ES To Mexico?*

**AW** I think he actually went to South America. So I'm not absolutely sure on the facts of that. But from what I understand, they negotiated a little bit, they got a little bit better contract than what he had offered them. Which was right down to the very bottom. Bare bones and everybody went back to work and not too much later he ended up moving the business out of the country anyway. He was a real piece of work that guy. Richard Dauch. The story goes that he worked for that plant before and moved up through the ranks and I think I heard they had promised him the big title for that facility. Like the CEO for that Gear & Axle that Detroit facility. And then they by passed him. Then story from what I remember, he said "I'll be back then I'm going to buy this company." He went out from what I understand, started his own business I think he did fairly well at it. Then he got hooked up with two or three other investors. Came back and bought the place. Then he moved it.

*ES Then he moved it. He probably sold it to some name that's out there now. Because I don't recognize that name and I know a lot suppliers.*

**AW** Yeah, look it up. It's actually a pretty good size company now. American Axle Manufacturing, AAM.

*ES It's out there now? How many plants now?*

**AW** I don't know. When I left there, I didn't really look back. The only thing I was concerned about American Axle was to make sure that they paid me my share of my pension. That's all I was worried about.

*ES Yeah, well you don't get two checks do you?*

**AW** No it all comes out one check from Fidelity Investments they handle the pension, but American Axle is on there and what they pay for my portion.

*ES If you weren't a UAW guy, you could have been out of job? You would have been out looking for a job at that age.*

**AW** The only thing I would have, actually if I wasn't UAW I wouldn't have that. Our trades cards are sanctioned by the UAW. That's not a General Motors card it's a UAW card.

*ES So there is a strong argument for unions?*

**AW** Absolutely.

*ES And what the UAW did for you. Then you went up to Pontiac and you went right into skilled trades there? At the same level? What about seniority? Did it affect your seniority because it was a different plant?*

**AW** It depends on the type of move. If you just article 69 move, they put in contract where you can ask to be transferred to another plant. Actually in another state. You could actually apply and you could make those moves and I don't remember if you can carry your seniority with you or not. If you moved when they had the 96 rule, if they moved the job from Detroit to Saginaw and you went with the job, they would call that a 96 move.

*ES And you keep all your seniority.*

**AW** You take all your seniority with you. Everything, corporate. My corporate seniority is different than my trade seniority. But yeah, you would take it all with you.

*ES But then you would have to move.*

**AW** Yes. They work out some different things and the union did all that. It was good. They did a lot of good and there is still a lot of good things.

*ES So what year if you remember, approximately what year did you go out to the Pontiac Plant?*

**AW** I want to say right around 2000. Because I think I had about 10 years in there when I



retired. So right around 2000.

*ES Out there were you back in the Committeeman role?*

**AW** No. I went back to my tools and I ended up in the same situation kind of out there with the whole Committeeman. I was a Committeeman out there for a while. And what happened was one of the guys retired mid-term so it left an opening. Then I was asked to go in there and then I ended up being a Committeeman. I had met my soon-to-be-wife, not really that soon, we dated for 7 years before we got married. I was in the process of negotiating some contractual issues, some overtime issues, trying to get the guy some money. He had a lot of grievances, stacks of grievances, so I had to deal with the salaried area managers in the different departments. Probably about a half a dozen of them I had to deal with. I was second shift. I was told by the Shop Committee to put my alternate on, while I negotiated this and they were to stand for the whole thing, while I took care of this business. Well, it took like several weeks. I want to say maybe a little more than a month. But being on second shift, I started at 2:30, those area managers went home about 4:00 they were winding up their day and doing paper work at the end of their shift. They really didn't want to deal with me. I did manage to push my way in and I managed to get everything kind of settled. They all wanted to be out of there by 4:30-5:00.

*ES Salaried guys?*

**AW** Salaried guys, they were day shift from different departments. Second shift was general foreman and supervisors. Some of the guys, there are always a couple in every crowd. A couple of the guys just made a point when the elections came back around for me to be a Committeeman. They made a point of pointing out why was my Alternate on when I was seen running around with this girl I was dating at the time, partially my fault I should have kept off the floor. They didn't need to see any of that. Kind of my fault. But little do they know that after the elections and all that and the money was paid out I'm the one who got them that money. They got some pretty big checks some of those guys. The guy that went in there, that's all I heard about him bitching about after that was. "Every time this guy comes out all he tells us is they can do that." So that's all I could do was shrug my shoulders, "I don't know what you are talking about." He wasn't fighting for them though. My reputation was, if I got a call, depending on how serious it was, I would kind of do the charge. I would come in and I made it kind of miserable for the supervisors. I wanted to find out what the heck was going on and if it looked like they were screwing with somebody, I wanted to protect that man. I knew who the screw-offs were and who the workers were. And I knew who the good supervisors were, and who the shitty supervisors were. I knew who was putting pressure on who and kind of knew what the heck was going on. Once you are in that job you get to know them. A lot of times I would go in there with guns blazing. "What the hell's going on here, why are you messing with my people." I was not afraid at all to write a grievance. There's a whole lot of stuff to write grievances about. Discrimination, improper job assignment, if he looked at me the wrong way, I don't like the way he combed his hair. there's a whole lot of things you can write about grievances. You just create a paper trail. I didn't actually write those kind of grievances, but you know what I'm saying.

*ES I was a supervisor with the Teamsters for a while.*

**AW** So you know what I'm talking about.

*ES Some grievances are real and some are not.*

**AW** Some of them are frivolous and they generally get tossed out. Honor roll. We wrote a lot of stuff, I threw a lot of stuff out.

*ES You threw it out, you might talk to the guy and say I don't think this is...*

**AW** Yeah, "this isn't going to go anywhere, your boss promised me he was not going to screw with you anymore or he'll do this for you. Hey, you know what, he needs a guy on

Saturday he wants to know if you want to come in, work a half a day or something?" That's kind of tricky, because overtime is based on seniority. You just have to be careful and make sure you go by the books to do that.

*ES So as it turned out, you were at the top, a Committeeman, at a different level?*

*AW I didn't care to be at the top. It's very hard to deal with labor relations.*

*ES That's almost administration/interpersonal job.*

*AW I'm not real good with people, I have a habit of flying off sometimes. I had a hard time keeping a cool head with some of those supervisors, cause they just grind me the wrong way. Labor relations I was fine with because they would talk. I don't have a problem with people who want to sit down and talk about things. But when the supervisor and the general foremen on the floor, they do whatever it is they have to do to try to get a job. They don't care.*

*ES Those guys, General Foreman and the supervisors, did they generally come from the ranks and get promoted or were they like college grads that came in.*

*AW They used to move up. Generally the supervisors that were over the skilled trades had come up through the ranks. That didn't necessarily make them a good supervisor. There was good and bad on both sides. The last few years that I had worked, I want to say from 2005 on, maybe a little earlier than that, they started hiring supervisors off the street.*

*ES Like new college grads?*

*AW Well, there was a variety. They had a couple guys that were out of college. One guy, and he boasted that he literately was a rocket scientist. He had no business being in there, he was too smart to be in that place, to put up with our crap.*

*ES Maybe as management they were experimenting with different types.*

*AW They might have been at the time. I believe a good boss, especially in the trades needs to know what the guys are doing. What kind of work they are doing. You need to work with them for a while to find out exactly what going on. When I go up there to talk to you about a high pressure steam lines or reducing station and I tell you it's doing this or that, you need to have some understanding of what I'm talking about so you can help me. Give me the parts I need or whatever. A lot of these guys didn't have a clue, just fix it and they would stand there.*

*ES I'll interject this, when I was a UPS Supervisor, they wouldn't make you a supervisor unless you had spent at least a year as a driver. So you knew what the driver did. I think I was a good plan.*

*AW I agree, I think that anyone who works for the Big Three, I don't care who you are, you should start off on that assembly line. At least put a couple weeks in working on that line. I mean you can move fast through the ranks but you need to do one aspect of everything. Most of the departments had what they called group leaders. The guy could work with you, probably be a group leader after only working a couple weeks on the line. But he could work with the group leader to see what's involved, help him out, do his thing, and be a relief man, help to relieve a couple people so they can see how many people it takes. People got to go to the bathroom. You gotta go, you gotta go. That kind of stuff. I totally agree with that. Start them right at the bottom and move them up.*

*ES Do they keep that line going all the time? Or do they come to a point where they stop and everyone take a break or lunch at the same time?*

*AW The plants work it differently. The GM contract you get, for an eight-hour shift, if you are working eight hours with a half an hour unpaid lunch, then you would get a 23 minute break, between your start time and lunch and 23 minute break between your lunch time and go home time. The different plants worked it differently. In fact, a lot of them were doing, just say, "you know what just work through your break after lunch, and you just go home, the last 23 minutes we'll just let you go and we'll punch you all out. As long as*

everybody was in agreement with that, they would do that. A lot of the assembly lines did that.

*ES* Now, as far as the pay scales and all that, leading up to, you retired when exactly, what year?

*AW* July 1<sup>st</sup> of 2008.

*ES* So right after the big bail out.

*AW* June 30<sup>th</sup> was my last day employed

*ES* 2008, so that was right after, right during the big bail out?

*AW* I got a buy out. They offered me a buy out. Perfect timing, I was ready to go out anyway. How old was I? Because my dad had passed away, just a few years after he had retired, I promised myself that I would retire early enough so I would at least have five years of retirement. I think at that time I figured out I wanted to be out of there when I was 55. Which would give me 33 years. I ended up working until I had 35 years, so I was 57, I want to say.

*ES* O.K., same year I retired. Same age I retired. It's a good age to retire.

*AW* It is a good age to retire.

*ES* Hopefully you get more than five years.

*AW* I feel like I did the right thing, well 2 more years and I'll have my five.

*ES* You qualify for social security at age 62. Was any of that affected? I know there were a lot of adjustments made but none of that affected your pension, because you got out at the right time. Right?

*AW* Yeah my wife is involved in all that [Andy's wife still works at the plant and is in her 40's]. I understand and she tells me that her pension is frozen. I keep telling her she needs to get on the Fidelity site and see what's going on with it. She had 11 years when they told her, her pension was frozen. Your vested after 10 years. I don't care where you work, you're vested after 10 years. From what I understand, I don't know if that this is true either, but I understand new hires are not getting a pension plan.

*ES* I heard that.

*AW* They are being pushed, not forced but pushed toward 401K, which is a good idea. I don't know if they are doing that or not, but I would like to see the corporation contribute to that. I think 401K's are great. That way you don't have to worry about, "am I going to have a pension?"

*ES* So as of now they are not contributing anything?

*AW* I don't know all that. I'm not up on it. It upsets me when my wife comes home and tells me things. She kind of does what she's told at work and I get upset with what she does too.

*ES* She's not a fighter like you?

*AW* I was like, "you know what, I'm going to do my job", but I'm going to do only my job, don't ask me to do someone else's job, that's what they get paid for. They get paid good money, don't ask me to do their job. Some parts of my job are dangerous which is why we got the big bucks. I mean, I was standing up working up in the building ceil, walking around like a cat on a wire. I spent probably 90% of the years in my apprenticeship or my training, skilled trade at Gear & Axle up in that building ceiling. Cause that's where all the pipes are. And there's loose pipes and there are loose building steels, loose struts, we took our lives in our hands when we went up there. There was not a lot of safety going on back then. They just wanted us to get the job done.

*ES* You talk safety, but at the end of the day...

*AW* Yeah, be careful when you're up there.

*ES* I guess it's pretty well assumed without the bailout GM and Chrysler would have been history. What would you attribute that to? I was recently talking to somebody else



*about this guy Rick Wagner, President and CEO at GM, who was with GM a long, long time. As soon as they announced the bail out, he was toast. The problems that GM had, what would you attribute them to? Bad management over many years, complacency in management; or maybe foreign imports?*

**AW** I think the NAFTA agreement was a big part of it.

**ES** *Where they could make things in Mexico cheaper and bring it in.*

**AW** We would pay tariff, and the foreign countries wouldn't have to. It was way off balance, they are trying to even all this up.

**ES** *When NAFTA came in, I personally said to myself, it didn't make sense to me. I'm just injecting my own thought. The only way you could make that work is if the Mexican, Canadian and whoever was involved in these, if their wage scale went up to the same as your scale, but that would never happen so your guys scale would inevitably have to go down. And theirs would rise and reach some equilibrium or it wouldn't work. That's the way I saw it. It just made common sense to me.*

**AW** I see the same thing. But I didn't see it happening through that agreement, cause once they are in those other countries they are going to do what those other countries allow them to do. Like Mexico. "We are just glad to have your business down here. Pay our guys two bucks an hour or fifty cents a day or whatever you want to pay them, we're just happy to have you down here, put our people to work." It was bad all the way around.

**ES** *So you think NAFTA had a lot to do with it.*

**AW** I think that had a lot to do with it. I think that deal that we had talked earlier about that the eliminating or creating the mini-strikes as opposed to just shutting the whole corporation down. Just saying "look, if you don't give us this and this is that important to us, everybody is going to walk."

**ES** *To some extent then, you might attribute some responsibility to the union giving up some of its power too?.*

**AW** Whatever possessed the union to do that. Whoever came up with that idea is an idiot and should have been kicked out of the UAW when he suggested that. This many strikes. That's all of our power right there, that's all of the union's power is when you go to the company, and say look, "we are going to shut you down." From that point on they would say, "go ahead". Do your mini-strike.

**ES** *How do you feel about this Scott Walker? You probably know who that is? Governor of Wisconsin and Rick Wagner, here in Michigan. He's trying to eliminate collective bargaining.*

**AW** Oh, our lustrous Governor?

**ES** *Yes, any comments on that? I don't want to get too much into politics.*

**AW** You got a gun with you? [laughing]

**ES** *I'll tell you off the record, I sent my own money to Wisconsin for the recall of Scott Walker.*

**AW** It's the break of the back of the workingman in general. Just like our Governor, I am now paying Michigan tax. I don't have a problem paying Michigan tax. I don't think we should have ever been totally out of it. We live in the state, I don't mind paying taxes. But I've read a couple different articles on line from, I would think, fairly reliable sources. Like CNN and USA News Today, couple of those. They laid the figure out. They are giving tax breaks to businesses and they are making it up by taxing the people who are on fixed income. The middle class and lower class people to give, and I'm not talking about middle businesses or small businesses owners. We are talking like corporations to give them tax breaks.

**ES** *Well even the oil companies that make more money than God, get tax breaks.*

**AW** His budget in essence stayed the same from what I understand. I could have read it

wrong. They got the same amount coming in, it's just that they are not getting it from business taxes, they're now getting it from retired folks who are on fixed incomes. Most of it, cause these are the new taxes. So yeah, I guess most of it is coming from us, those of us who have retirement.

**ES** *You go back to Henry Ford's day too, you gotta remember, this is just my opinion on this, that Henry Ford went from \$2.00 a day to \$5.00 a day or something, because he said "I'll sell more cars, because now that the people making the cars can afford to buy them." So if you start taking the money away from these people, where is all the demand gonna be?*

**AW** I am making more on my retirement than what the new hires are making in their wages at General Motors. And that's without taking a distribution from my 401K, just my pension is more than what these people are making. These poor kids.

**ES** *Used to be, a story I like to tell is when I delivered the Detroit News and Detroit Free Press, there could be an auto worker living in your neighborhood, you deliver a paper to them and he can support a family. Your dad, my dad, had a union wage scale and the wife didn't have to work. And they maybe only had one car.*

**AW** That's all we had.

**ES** *Now, it takes two incomes and you still may not be able to make it. Anything else you want to add? I think you've given me a really good story.*

**AW** Really?

**ES** *Yeah.*

**AW** I could probably give you more if you pick my brain a little more.

**ES/AW** [laughing]

**AW** I'm surprised I didn't fly off the handle. Some of that stuff really upsets me.

**ES** *I'll give you a chance here.*

**AW** I try to maintain.

**ES** *I appreciate you taking the time.*

**AW** It's actually been fun.

**ES** *Thanks Andy.*

**AW** This is one of the worst things that happened, there was a time, for years, when I was in the trades, that we had, we called it the tool crypt. It was basically like a general store for the whole plant. The job setters would go in and buy tooling for their machines on their production jobs. They would keep all of the fittings and stuff for the pipefitters and all of the electrical gadgets for all the electricians.

**ES** *Sort of a Parts Depot?*

**AW** Yeah, like a Parts Depot. We had a group leader, who was a pipefitter group leader for the pipefitters, would give us a job, "go out here and do this job". So we would go out, a team, usually two of us. We would go out and scope the job out. We would get our little piece of paper out and start writing down, take some measurements, estimate how many lengths of pipe we need, what size pipe, how many different fittings, what kind of fittings, 9-hd's, angle iron, all of that stuff. Well, in this general store area, the tool crypt, this is where all of our fittings were. The pipe and stuff, that kind of stuff was out on a rack, we could just go out and get. But we had to write recs for the parts, for the fittings. We used to go in there and everything was in boxes, we would carry a rec pad in there with us, pull the number parts out, write down the part number, how many we got, put our badge number down on it and give it to the crypt person, who would enter it into their catalog or whatever, inventory, so they could reorder them as things ran down. And we kind of took care of it. We worked with those people. I'm sure a few people walked out of there with a couple nuts and bolts, here and there. There was some thievery going on. But I don't understand why they did this. First thing they did was they locked the door on

us and said we're not allowed in there anymore. We can write our check out, that we have to have and slip them under the door. From there they went to, "Well you have to get a supervisor's signature." That went to probably months, I don't know how many months, six months or so. Then it went to, "well now you have to get a General Foreman's signature." We're making like \$34, \$35 bucks an hour, two of us. Now if we need one, thirty cent, half inch, elbow, to finish a job and we have to ride around for half a day to find a General Foreman to sign a check for a thirty cent part. They're paying about \$500 for that part. How many freaking nuts and bolts can you steal out of there before you're up to \$500.

**ES** *It's a trade off between shrinkage...*

**AW** They were losing money like crazy. They were paying us for doing nothing, because they were afraid someone was going to steal a nut or bolt out of that crypt. Because they wanted to count every single little part, washer, whatever. Then they would turn around on top of that and say that we couldn't get our jobs done, we were inefficient at doing our jobs. I just looked at one of them one day and said, "you know what, you made the rules, I didn't make these rules. Me and my partner have to run around for half a day and maybe find a supervisor to sign a check for a thirty-cent part. Who's fault is that? Who's inefficiency is that? That's not ours. I'm more than willing to put that part on there and get done with that fucking job and go home or go back to the crypt and be finished with it. That's not my fault, don't blame that shit on me and then tell me you are going to bring contractors in to do my work, because we're inefficient.

**ES** *They would bring contractors in?*

**AW** Absolutely.

**ES** *Non UAW people? They could do that?*

**AW** They were outside contractors, they were union contractors. When they did that, sometimes it was man-for-man, sometimes if they even brought somebody in just to do pipefitter work on a Saturday, they had to bring every pipefitter in. And then it got down to like man-for-man.

**ES** *Another word they had to have a UAW guy there with a non-UAW guy there?*

**AW** Yes. That was big. And I'm sure that micromanagement was not just in that area, I'm sure it was all over the place. It seemed like from that point on that supervisors seem more and more scared about their job and keeping tabs on what was going on. Because somebody was on their back and somebody was on their back, nitpicking. Sometimes you have to let things do what they do. Most of us are there to do a job and we will do our job. We don't need this guy telling that guy to tell that guy to tell that guy to tell that guy that he's gotta get a check to get a thirty-cent part. Then that guy has to tell that guy who has to tell that guy who has to tell that guy that he wrote the check for a thirty-cent part. That's not efficiency for me. To me, those guys are idiots. They need to be replaced.

**ES** *You said the cars are better today?*

**AW** I think the cars are better today. I've got a 1995 pick-up that's got over 200,000 miles on it. The only thing that's wrong with it right now is I got something going on with the timing, so it's not running right. Pretty much that's the only thing that's ever been wrong with that truck. Over 200,000 miles. I know a lot of people that have had a lot of GM products and they are running them a long, long time. Do you remember when we were kids, you were lucky to get 80,000 miles on a car. Back in the late 1960s, early 1970s.

**ES** *That's true.*

**AW** People were buying cars, if you didn't get one every two years, you definitely had to get one if your car was like four or five years old. You had to get another one.

**ES** *Do you think foreign cars had something to do with the quality or do you think that prompted the Big Three?*



**AW** I think it did push it, yes. Which was a good thing. That part of it was good there.

**ES** *I saw my first Toyota in 1968 at the Cobo Hall auto show. First Toyota. It was all American cars. In the corner there was this little, light blue Toyota Corolla or something. It was the first Toyota I ever saw. It was \$1,700, half what an American car was.*

**AW** I had heard, and I don't know how true the rumors are on this, but I had heard the foreign countries would just, and you could almost see it most recently with the KIA. They would just push their little cars in here and from what I understand they would sell these cars to the American people at a loss. Just to get them on the American's ropes. People are very loyal, a lot of people are sheep, they won't look, they have blinders on. Like, "KIA was my first car and I loved it. I wanted to drive that car for the rest of my life." The next thing you know, they bring the next model up in and now there is luxury KIA's out there.

**ES** *Honda's.*

**AW** Yep, Honda's, Hyundai, Toyota, Subaru.

**ES** *I didn't know this until today that the Honda plant in Ohio, Marysville, OH is a non-UAW plant.*

**AW** Is it?

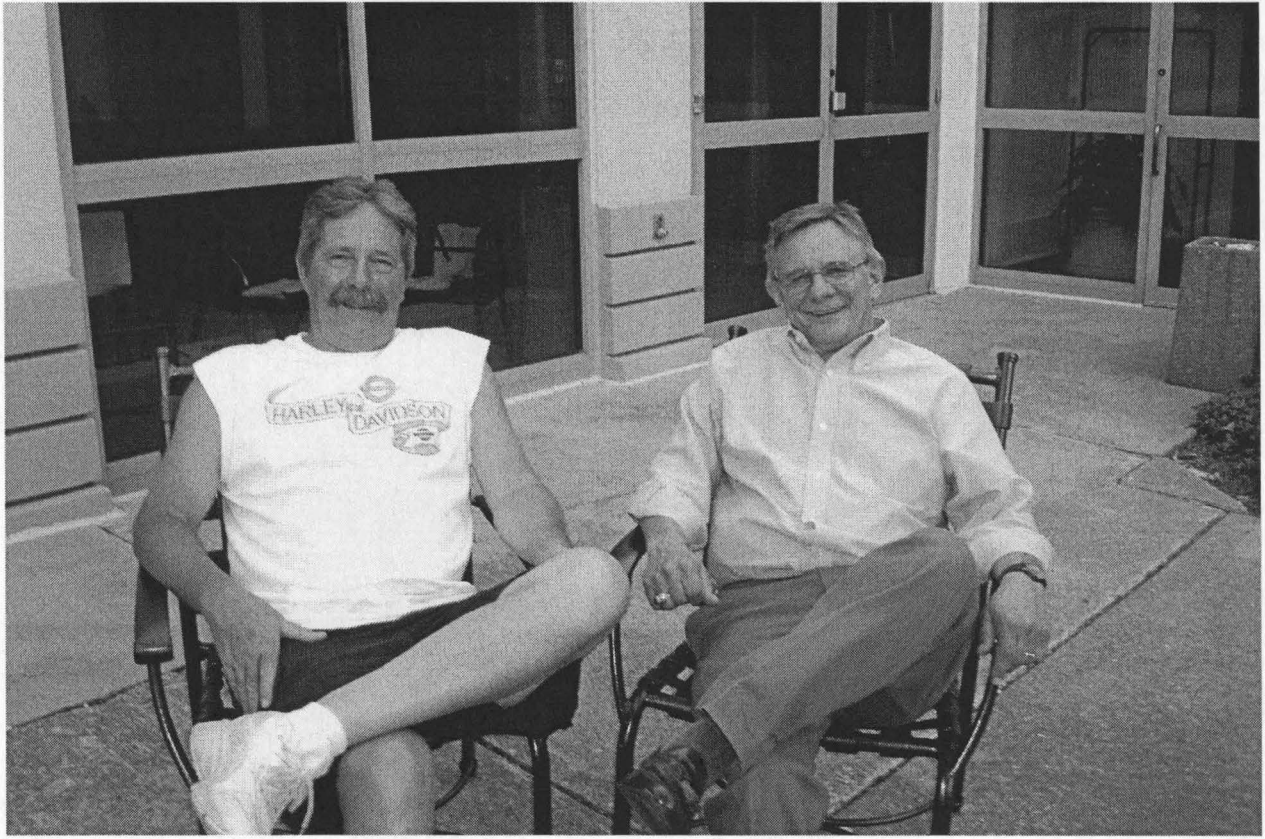
**ES** Yes.

**AW** Is Ohio a right to work state. You know they are talking about doing that here in Michigan?

**ES** *Making it a right to work state?*

**AW** Yes. I had heard it, not a lot. Every once in awhile it gets brought up, but I don't really hear a lot about it.

**ES** *I wouldn't be surprised. I was told that today. [Researcher concludes the interview with his thanks]*



Retired UAW Skilled Tradesman, Andy Warmack, and researcher in the courtyard at the DoubleTree Hotel, Novi, Michigan, July 20, 2012.