

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
GM Lordstown

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O.H. 1944

Ken Blazina
Interviewed
By
Ruth Bilcheck
On
February 15, 2001

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INTERVIEWEE: KEN BLAZINA

INTERVIEWER: Ruth Bilcheck

SUBJECT: GM Lordstown

DATE: February 15, 2001

B: This is an oral history project the interviewer is Ruth Bilcheck the interviewee Ken Blazina it is February 15, 2001. Would you like to start by stating your name?

BL: Ken Blazina.

B: Can you start by telling me a little bit about your family background?

BL: Well my grandparents came from Yugoslavia and spent a little time in Pennsylvania and then moved to Girard Ohio. There were eight kids in that family. My grandfather was a machinist for the railroad during the Depression. It was a fairly decent job but things were tight for everyone back then. My mom's side of the family sort of came the same way. My grandfather died at a young age and my grandmother remarried, she had four kids in her family. The fellow she remarried worked in a steel mill in Youngstown. My dad also worked in a steel mill when he was young. He went into World War II, came back and continued work in the steel mill then retired in 1980 from Youngstown Sheet and

Tube. My mom was just a housewife she stayed home and took care of the household.

B: How many children are in your family?

BL: Just me. I'm the only one.

B: Did your family basically come from Yugoslavia to Northeast Ohio then?

BL: As far as I know yes.

B: Tell me a little bit about yourself. When were you born?

BL: I was born in Youngstown in 1952. A few years later my parents settled down in Girard and I lived there for quite a few years. In fact my parents still live there.

B: What school did you graduate from?

BL: I graduated from Prospect Elementary School and I finished at Girard High School.

B: What neighborhood in Girard did you live in?

BL: I was off of route 304 up by the water tanks. That's what we used to call it.

B: Did you ever move or did you just live in one house in that area?

BL: My parents lived in the same home their whole lives in fact they're still there.

B: Tell me about your first job after high school.

BL: After high school I worked in a gas station for a year or two. I was attending college at the time but that wasn't my cup of tea so I went to work in the steel mills.

B: What did you want to do when you grew up?

BL: I guess like most people I wanted to be like my dad.

B: So working in a steel mill was fine?

BL: Yes.

B: Then what happened?

BL: I spent over eight years in the steel mills. I fell into the job pretty good. I was in my late twenties at that time and the steel mills all started shutting down in the area and I was left without a job.

B: What year was that about?

BL: 1980

B: What kind of jobs did you do at the steel mill?

BL: I worked in the conditioning department. I was a bar scarfer and I was a crane man the last couple of years which was pretty rewarding work and the pay was pretty reasonable.

B: After the steel mill what happened?

BL: I was out of work for four years. It seemed like there weren't any jobs at all in Youngstown. I was by myself so it wasn't too bad. I stayed with my folks and decided to go back to Youngstown State and finish my Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering.

B: So you're a degreed engineer.

BL: At that time I was looking for work in the area and even for engineers work was hard to find. I had a lot of chances for civil service jobs but I applied for apprenticeships instead. I was hired at General Motors as an apprentice pipe fitter.

B: Did you just walk in off the street when you applied at General Motors?

BL: I went into the employment office where they were offering an apprenticeship test. I signed up for the test, took the test and within a few months I was notified that I qualified. They told us that 75% of those that were chosen came from within the plant and 25% came from outside the plant.

B: You already had your degree at that time?

BL: No I was just finishing up.

B: What year did you start working at Lordstown?

BL: In April of 1985.

B: In what trade?

BL: In the pipe fitter trade.

B: Was that your first choice?

BL: No my first choice was millwright, then electrician then a W.E.M.R. I didn't choose pipe fitter.

B: How was it that you got pipe fitter?

BL: They went through the scores on the test and the people that already worked in the plant got extra credit basically I just kind of slid in there so when they offered me the pipe fitter trade I thought I'd give it a try.

B: Has it been a good fit?

BL: Yeah, it's turned out real well. My hydraulics and mechanical background work as well as the training I received over the years from experienced journeymen helped out a lot. Right now I'm into predictive maintenance so pipe fitting helps in there too.

B: What department or areas of the plant did you work?

BL: As an apprentice every four or five months they'd move you to a different area of the plant. Plus the van plant was in operation at the time so I went between the van plant and assembly plant for automobiles. First we had a separate maintenance building where you'd spend some time in the central maintenance building. So you made the rounds and got to every area and every corner of the plant.

B: How long was the apprenticeship program?

BL: It was a four-year apprenticeship but we were working a lot of over time because the van plant caught fire. We worked seven days a week twelve hours a day so I finished up in a little over three years.

B: What happened to college at this time?

BL: I finished college early in my apprenticeship. Since I had a college degree I could wave a lot of my apprenticeship classes so I only had to take a few of those.

B: Your apprenticeship experience did it prepare you well for work at Lordstown?

BL: Yes. It trains almost anyone to be a good journeyman. The journeymen take you by the hand and show you what they've learned over the years plus the classes you take during this time prepare you for the trade you're going to be in.

B: What kinds of people were in the apprenticeship program with you at the time?

BL: In the piper fitter trade there was only one other guy beside myself that came from outside the plant the rest all came from inside the plant. About ninety percent were males and the rest were women. Some fellows told me the classes seemed to help them a lot. Anyone who spends four years in an apprenticeship can come out and compete as a journeyman.

B: So it was a good program?

BL: Yes you're an adequate journeyman when you come out.

B: Being an outsider were you treated differently than people from inside the plant?

BL: It seemed like ninety-eight percent of the people treated the outsiders pretty well. There were a handful of people, the vintage sixty-six people that didn't want to see any outsiders in the plant especially in the trades because the trade jobs were so wanted by everyone.

B: Did you ever experience any ill will or hostility as a result?

BL: Yes we had an apprenticeship coordinator, an electrician, and he had the attitude that he didn't like you if you were from the outside so we had to contend with that. Luckily we had a lot of good people in there that didn't have that attitude.

B: That's good. Can you tell me about your typical day as an apprentice pipe fitter?

BL: It's seems like the day started like any other. You punched in and you were supposed to be at work on time because your journeyman insisted on that. It depended on what your job was that day. For instance if I was in the paint department and I was assigned a particular person to work with I did whatever jobs had to be done, had my lunch, and took care of the line in the afternoon.

B: What do you mean you took care of the line?

BL: In the paint department for instance you had to change sealer barrels. They applied sealer to the cars and you had to take the barrels and change them under the pumps. You had to service the pumps in a particular way and it had to be done in a cost efficient basis when the line was in operation. Plus you had to address any problems that people might have on the line. If brushes needed

changed or they had trouble with their equipment you'd carry a radio and go out and fix their problems.

B: All while the line is working your working?

BL: Correct.

B: There is so much going on. Was it dangerous?

BL: Most of us in the trade that work with this equipment tried to work safely and were trained to work safely so there usually wasn't any problems. With the really touchy stuff we'd work on it on the weekends when the lines weren't running.

B: Since you're working with paints were there any volatile gases emitted as the result of all of this.

BL: Even as early as the eighties we had lacquer in there. We had MEK (methyl ethyl ketone) and oleum another solvent. People started into the program wearing gloves and respirators and after awhile would use their bare hands. About fifteen years ago the chemicals were really starting to affect people there. The paint was a high solvent-based paint. Recently they've gotten rid of a lot of that.

B: Did you ever see anybody get hurt as a result of working with chemicals like that?

BL: As far as getting hurt, I got thinner in my eyes from paint lines. I've seen people get hit with paint. Nothing you could really fix. But I've also seen "paint mix" people with brain problems and cancers. I would attribute it to not wearing their equipment or not having effective equipment but I don't really know that for sure.

B: When did the protective equipment start to come in?

BL: I began to notice it in the early nineties. At that time they began to really start pushing to get rid of a lot of the chemicals like MEK, which affects the nervous

system and is thought to cause cancer. Instead they went to a lower solvent-based paint and to a clear coat enamel. They seem like they're really trying to eliminate the harsher chemicals.

B: What else happened throughout your day as you were dealing with the needs of the people on the line?

BL: What was nice about the trade jobs was that you could leave the line whenever you wanted whereas the people on the line had to hold up their hand to use the bathroom. It was ninety-five degrees in the summer time in the paint shop on the second floor and the cars were coming out of the oven so hot that you couldn't touch them with your hand. People would pass out sometimes from the heat. I would go out and sit on the roof with my radio on until I had a call to change a barrel or something.

B: So you got a break.

BL: That's why the trade jobs were better. Not only because you made a little bit more money but also because you could get a break from that constant line speed.

B: For those on the line was there an opportunity for a break?

BL: Usually there was an opportunity to get a break.

B: During your apprenticeship what shift did you work?

BL: They switched our shifts. I worked daylight and some midnights and afternoons.

B: Was it usually day shifts?

BL: In the beginning they put you on day shifts so they could keep an eye on you so you didn't get hurt and you could turn to someone if you had any problems but as you got into your apprenticeship they'd try to move you around into other shifts.

B: Did you know anybody that didn't make it through the apprenticeship program?

BL: One fellow that started with us as an electrician quit to become a doctor. He had a college offer, so he left. I also think there was a millwright that was thrown out but this was before my class. Everyone in my class made it through.

B: So if you were accepted into the apprenticeship program they pretty much saw to it that you graduated or was it that people had such high caliber that they were going to finish.

BL: There was no question that it was the caliber. The people that came from production hated production and the line so bad that they would do anything to get into the trades, and people like myself from the outside, that were hand picked, we endeavored to get that tradesman card.

B: So when you were called to go to work at Lordstown, was that a pretty happy day for you?

BL: Yes, I actually had other jobs lined up and they weren't bad jobs, but Lordstown was where the money was.

B: The other jobs didn't pay as much?

BL: No, and the benefits weren't quite as good.

B: What year did you finish your apprenticeship?

BL: 1988.

B: What job did you do after your apprenticeship?

BL: I was groomed for a year to work in the paint shop, and I worked second shift right into my apprenticeship. Usually when you finish your apprenticeship is when you go to second shift. So, it was just like another day at work for me. I

I was working for another journeyman, and one fellow was off sick most of the time, so I was like an acting journeyman for almost a year.

B: But not being paid as an active journeyman?

BL: Yes you're paid for the job, but it wasn't quite journeyman's pay.

B: So second shift was what hours?

BL: It was 2:30 to 10:30 back then.

B: Was that a good shift?

BL: Terrible shift!

B: Why was it a terrible shift?

BL: It was hot in the summer time and your friends were out enjoying themselves and you had to go to work at 2:30 in the afternoon. When you were in the trades it wasn't a five day a week thing it was six or seven days. You didn't have too much free time to really enjoy yourself, and that's important, especially when you're a younger person.

B: What was the likelihood of getting off second shift?

BL: For myself, it was seven years. So I just put my time in and waited until I could hold another shift.

B: So you worked in the paint shop right after your apprenticeship. How long did you work there?

BL: I worked there close to ten years. It was one of those things where you've learned a job, and it's so easy, because you've done it such a long time, that you know all the areas, the shortcuts, the equipment so you fall right into it.

B: Were your fellow pipe fitters easy to work with?

BL: Most fellows were pretty easy to get along with.

B: Were there any people that were difficult to get along with?

BL: There were a couple of fellows that are retired now. This is before I was even in the paint shop. They were sort of nasty individuals. I don't think anybody really wanted to work with them, but when you're an apprentice you had to work with them, and when you finished up, they wanted to be your buddy. I told them what I thought of them at that time.

B: What about management and bosses?

BL: Most management was pretty decent. Every now and then you'd get a manager that was a real gung ho idiot. Most management at the time came from the trades themselves so they understood the work to be done. Now in the last few years it's sort of changed. They used to help you.

B: Did that mean that a foreman might actually help a journeyman do a job or so?

BL: He really didn't do the work but he could do the brain power with you and sit down and talk it over to give you some insight into the problem. They even got more people to help you. Most foremen were pretty helpful.

B: So you worked in the paint department from 1989 until 1996.

BL: Pretty much yes. I worked with the urethane glass for a while but mostly the paint department.

B: As a piper fitter journeyman tell me a little bit more about your day, like where do you park your car, how you clock in.....

BL: On second shift back then, most people would come into the plant the same time production would, and you'd have to park way back in the lot, so it would take

you awhile to find a parking space and a long time to walk in. Then you had to change your clothes (they gave us coveralls to wear) and report to your work area. You had to be sure to report to your work area on time, and at the time I was carrying a radio, so I'd be on duty.

B: Did you get report or anything from the previous shift?

BL: Yes, if something was going on, but usually he'd just give me the radio because he didn't want to stay there any longer than he had to. Sometimes we'd work over time and the shifts would overlap so you'd have more time to talk about anything that happened.

B: Was there any paper work that you had to do or did the foreman do all the paperwork?

BL: Most of the paper work is done by the foreman and what paper work we had to do at the time was done when we went on break or when we had to test equipment. We had to sign off on the MVSS the Motor Vehicle Safety Standards on brake fluid and the brake testing machines. For the windshields upstairs we had to sign off that the primer was applied right, because of the windshields flying out of the cars, that was an MVSS problem also.

B: Windshields flying out of the cars?

BL: If you apply the primer before you put the windshield on the urethane glass there would be no problems, but if it wasn't applied right, then the glass wouldn't stick to the window so it would either leak or fly out in an accident.

B: So somebody could come back and see who was working on a certain car on a certain day?

BL: Well at least that the work was being checked.

B: Did you ever feel so overwhelmed in a day that you couldn't get all the work done that was assigned?

BL: No I never had that problem. Most of the time it was do as much work as you can that day and at the end of the shift you punch out and go home. If you had to work over, then they'd accommodate you all the time and let you work over to finish your job if you had a special job to do.

B: Or else you'd just pick it up the next day?

BL: Yes.

B: Tell me about where you used to eat your lunch.

BL: At the time we used to eat in the paint shop. We had a couple of van chairs up there. We'd sit back on a steel beam and we had a little steel table, a workbench and we'd eat right there. We'd go out on the roof and look at the sunshine sometimes and then go back into the shop.

B: Were you real concerned about the time when you ate lunch. Did it matter how long you took?

BL: We could take lunch whenever we wanted really. Ours was about the same time as production's lunchtime, unless there was a special job we had to do when production took their lunch. But we took our time at lunch. We never worried about the clock.

B: Is there a lunchroom facility? A cafeteria?

BL: Yes there is a cafeteria on the mesaneen but most of the time we didn't go to the cafeteria. Some fellows went all the time and ate there. At the time they used to

cook real food there. A bunch of girls would cook ham and eggs on Saturday mornings and you could sit around a round table with your buddies and they'd cook whatever you wanted. Then they went to fast food a couple of years back so it's like McDonald's when you go in there now.

B: Were those people employed by General Motors or was that a franchise?

BL: They franchised that out.

B: So after lunch what happened for the rest of the day?

BL: After lunch the line would start up again and you'd put the radio on, and if you weren't called on the radio the time was yours. If you had projects to do or some guns to rebuild or something you could do that.

B: If you could describe your job in one word what would it be?

BL: One word is hard. Service to people. I'd use three words. That's what it came down to.

B: Service to which people?

BL: The people on the line, the people making the cars. You were there to service those people. If they needed something they couldn't get away to do it so it was your responsibility to help them out and do it for them.

B: Did you have a nickname at work?

BL: I was Bluto.

B: How is it that you came to have a nickname?

BL: I don't know. A lot of fellows had nicknames, that was my nickname they said because I looked liked Bluto on Popeye so that's the name I got stuck with.

B: How do you feel about that name?

BL: It's alright, it could have been worse.

B: Did you ever socialize with your work buddies?

BL: Yes I socialized to a point. The fellows that were in the golf league socialized a lot. I didn't golf. The fellows that did the league stuff usually socialized more. We used to have a pipe fitters picnic back then. It was a once a year thing but that's pretty much faded away now.

B: What's the average age of the average pipe fitter?

BL: I'd like to say maybe middle fifties.

B: So what's the average age of the pipe fitter apprentice?

BL: At that particular time the age of the average apprentice was in their early thirties, late twenties.

B: At that time did you own a General Motors car?

BL: No I had an International car.

B: Did you ever think about driving a car that was produced at Lordstown?

BL: Yes, in 1987 I bought a cavalier. I figured if they were good enough to give me a job I'd buy a car from our plant.

B: How was the car?

BL: It was a pretty good car. It was the first car I had that never leaked. Usually the windows leaked in my other cars. It was sort of an adequate car but I was never really satisfied with it.

B: Are you active in the union? Did you go to any union meetings?

BL: I didn't go to too many union meetings. I did go to a couple recently, but up to this time I didn't go to hardly any union meetings at all.

B: Did you ever go to a union picnic or any activities?

BL: Yes once in a while I did go to a union activity. The union is run mostly by a bunch of employees. When your appointed to a union job you get to get off the line just like when you're appointed to a trade job, and they give you these little t-shirts to wear with your name on them. The union is a necessary evil I guess at Lordstown. It's good in a lot of ways but in a lot of ways it's sort of worthless.

B: So management appoints union people?

BL: The union people are appointed by the chairman or president. I'm not sure which one does it. It's usually his "friends" that get the union jobs. Every time there is a big change-over in the upper union management a lot of these jobs can be changed. Plus there are a few international appointees.

B: Did you ever need the services of the union?

BL: I guess we all have once in a while. I can't remember when I needed the union to represent me. I pretty much keep my nose clean as an apprentice because I had to. So I never had too many problems. Most of the time I settled things between the foreman and myself. Most of your foremen were pretty decent about things and you could talk to them about things and solve your problems.

B: Do you know of any of your work associates that needed the union and found that it was good to have the union?

BL: I would say yes. There were particular associates that went and disobeyed shop rules for whatever reason, and the union fought for them and got their time back or whatever and the union was very helpful for them. It was something nice to

have there for them. The union is definitely something that is better to have than not to have.

B: So the union really protects the workers?

BL: Absolutely.

B: Is there a time that you could see that the union didn't help the workers?

BL: I would say not so much the local but the international. The internationals made some programs that don't help the immediate workers sometimes. The way I see the union is when there is a problem with the union the biggest answer right away is, "screw the young guy". That's the solution. I believe the union should help both the union brothers and if it comes down to the young guy getting the short end of the stick, well that's unfortunate, but the main thing should be that both are members and pay their dues so you solve the problem without anyone getting hurt too bad. It's a brotherhood. They claim brotherhood all the time and it's not a brotherhood when the first solution is, "screw the young guy".

B: Do you think the union before 1996 was good for Lordstown management?

BL: I think the union was a real pain for Lordstown management. Al Alli was shop chairman for many years. I had a little of Al's reign before he passed away. Al did a lot for people. He cut a lot of deals. Usually to benefit most of the people, so Al was another person that was good but bad too. He helped himself out, but he also helped a lot of people out.

B: He helped workers out. Was he beneficial to management to?

BL: He kept them on their toes both local and internal, so yes; I'd say he was beneficial to management.

B: Back to a typical day what did you do after work?

BL: After work I usually just went home and watched TV and went to bed so I could get up early the next morning and have a little bit of a day to myself the next day.

B: What time would you get home after work?

BL: Usually a little after eleven. I'd get home and watch Johnny Carson and stay up until one. I'd usually get up around 8:30 and have a nice day to myself.

B: What kind of recreational activities did you do?

BL: I didn't have too much time for recreational activities. Most of the time it was cutting the grass or washing my car. Then I had to go shopping and to the bank you know, running errands. If I had a weekend off I would go fishing or hunting or go to the lake and swim. Usually during the week I didn't have time for that because I had to go right to work in the afternoon.

B: So was overtime required or requested of you?

BL: It was one of those things once you got into the trades, that's how you made your money. No one made you work but you were expected to work.

B: Was that for journeymen or management?

BL: A little bit of both.

B: Did you see technology change much from the beginning of your apprenticeship until 1996?

BL: The change was amazing! Just getting into the different kinds of paint they started to use! They changed their robots from a hydraulic mechanical robot to an all-electrical robot. They changed the way they pull cars through the booths, the way they clean the booths. Yes technology has really changed quite a bit.

B: For the better?

BL: Definitely for the better. Everything is cleaner and smoother. It's more user-friendly for people on the line. It took a lot of weight off where they used to do a lot of manual lifting. It's better for everyone.

B: Did you see these robots take away jobs from real people?

BL: I never really saw it, but I guess it did. The body shop used to be called the "jungle", because it was bunch of welding machines hanging everywhere. You'd see all kinds of people shooting with these spot welders, and now you have lines and lines of robots, and they do the welds a lot faster and in the corners and probably more accurate than people could ever do them. There are still a few welding stations. Most of the work was done by a lot of people, so yes I guess it got rid of a lot of jobs.

B: In the paint shop too?

BL: Yes the paint department too. They used to have rows and rows of people painting cars in the booths. Now there are robots in the booths that paint most of the car. There are just a handful of people painting in the booths now and those in the booths are breathing air supplied by hoods so they don't breath the fumes.

B: Has technology decreased the work for the pipe fitter?

BL: I wouldn't say it decreased the work. The work was always there because you were fixing the low technology stuff. Now it a matter of fixing the high technology stuff so it really hasn't decreased the work but it's changed the work.

B: What does Lordstown management do to keep people in the trades current with their jobs. Are there certification jobs, courses, classes?

BL: Yes, most people that go into a certain area or field are trained by somebody on the job before they are let loose by themselves.

B: Did you ever feel that your degree helped you working as a pipe fitter? Did you ever think about leaving your field of pipe fitting for a professional engineers job?

BL: Yes, I saw and was offered an engineering job at the plant and I just liked the hourly work a lot better. I punched the card and I got paid for when I was there. A lot of the salary workers don't get paid for the over time they put in. Like I said, I had a real nice job there, I had my coveralls, I knew my job and it was easy for me. The education in school helped me to understand things a whole lot easier so it was just a little niche I fell into.

B: Talk about your toolbox.

BL: Every apprentice gets their own toolbox. It was a Kennedy toolbox, and you'd go see someone to get a bottom made for it so it was bigger. You always had a couple toolboxes. You had special tools for special jobs. You put your toolbox in your area with your name on it and your picture is on the lid and that's your toolbox.

B: So how do you personalize the lid of you toolbox?

BL: I personalized it with pictures of myself, and other people put different things on theirs. In the old days if you opened the lid of a tool box people would have pictures of their families and friends or of themselves on vacation so everyone had their way of personalizing it.

B: So where do you keep your toolbox?

BL: Usually, close to your area or central to the area that you're going to be, so you can get to it real quick.

B: Are all the tools issued by Lordstown or did you have to purchase your own?

BL: As an apprentice you're given a tool allowance to buy tools of your own. But you'd get issued your tools from Lordstown. Most of the time you put your tools in a pouch and would carry those tools with you most of the time. The specialized tools you kept in the toolbox.

B: As a place of work is Lordstown a stressful place to work?

BL: As a tradesman, I'd say no, because you put in your eight hours and do what you can, and the best you can, and if you need help they give you help. I had zero stress there myself. For the people on line it's a little different because they're stuck there all day and can't get away. I'd imagine it's a lot more stressful for those people.

B: Did you see management as being stressed?

BL: Yes especially middle management. They are being stressed from upper management and then they are being stressed for people like myself, so I'd say there is more stress there than anywhere else.

B: How do you see people managing their stress? What do they do?

BL: They carry on with their jobs. You can see the disgust in the way that they talk and act. That's another reason I didn't want a salary job, because an engineer had to figure out the job right there. There was nobody to help them. If they made the wrong decision, the club would come down on their head, whereas in my particular job I didn't have that problem.

B: How do you feel about working at GM Lordstown?

BL: I feel that I'm performing a service. It's a good place to work; I'm well compensated for the time I spend there. For myself they've always been very open with me as far as training and have allowed me to expand my potential and I would hope the place would continue operation.

B: If you had a child would you want your child to work at Lordstown?

BL: Yes. Basically I would want the child to get into trades because a trades job not only shows what you can do with you mind but with your hands too. It brings out all your capabilities. A lot of people just use their minds and can't use their hands and vice versa but in the trades you're required to do both. As far as working on the production line you're sort of stuck in limbo and you can't move, so you really can't express your capabilities. You really have no control over how to do the jobs or how fast to do them and things like that.

B: Do you know people that are in school that are working on the line?

BL: Quite a few people go to college that work on the line. They'll stand there and read books, sometimes between their jobs.

B: Do those that go back to school continue working at Lordstown?

BL: I think most people do because they can't get the jobs that pay the same money and benefits that Lordstown pays, even though they may like to do a different job. I think mostly that people just go the school to enrich themselves and to prevent boredom.

B: What do you feel proudest about your job at Lordstown?

BL: I would say my effort. Anybody can take a part and make something but there you're like a craftsman. When you do something in your particular trade and it's crafted well and done right, and you can say, "I've done that", it feels good.

B: How does it feel when they take your job away because they've changed something?

BL: Well things always change, but when you know you've done it right, that's what counts.

B: Does someone from management ever say you've done a good job?

BL: Every so often they'd come around between shift changes and particularly when they thought there was something that we couldn't do, they'd come around and give us a lot of that-a-boys and so on. When the van plant caught fire and they reassembled the paint booths and put a new paint shop in, a lot of our people had a hand in doing that and the contractors threw us a big party and they had food and hats and presents for everybody. They were very impressed with all the work we got done.

B: When was this fire in the van plant?

BL: Shortly after I got hired maybe in 1986 or 1987. It ruined the whole paint department, and we went in and gutted it, and put a brand new paint department in there.

B: What caused the fire?

BL: From what I understand there was a defect in a fire protection unit in one of the paint lids, and the electrostatic equipment sparked and caused an explosion and the thing caught fire.

B: Wow and you worked in the reconstruction of the paint department?

BL: Yes, I was just an apprentice that was part of my overtime. I was just half way through my apprenticeship I'd imagine. It was a real good opportunity to spend a lot of time doing construction work from the ground up and learning things.

B: Did you ever see anyone get hurt?

BL: Seriously hurt, no. No as a matter of fact I got hurt myself.

B: How did you get hurt?

BL: I got hurt in a freak accident riding an electric truck. Before I knew it, I was hurt really bad and had the flesh ripped off my arm. It wasn't a pleasant experience but I recovered pretty well from it. A friend of mine that also came in from the outside got conked on the head with a pipe, and ended up having seizures and he never was right after that.

B: Were these accidents preventable?

BL: Yes I would say that both of them could have been prevented.

B: How could they have been prevented?

BL: Myself, they should have had the area quarantined off where the trucks were going. If you couldn't get in around that particular area, you couldn't get hurt. With him, maybe if he was wearing a hard hat or if the pipe was braced in a different way, then maybe he wouldn't have gotten injured.

B: Is he still working?

BL: No, he had a big problem with General Motors. They claimed that it was a previous injury and he went to a lot of doctors and he lost his job over it.

B: What is he doing now?

BL: For a while he was selling computers. It was unfortunate, because he was just getting on his feet and married his second wife. He was just starting to enjoy his life before the accident happened.

B: How long did it take for you to get better?

BL: It was probably three to four months before I felt decent. You're never really better; you still have the scars and your injury and your still never as strong or as painless as you were before.

B: What year did your accident happen?

BL: It was right about the time they shut the van plant down. About 1993 or somewhere around there.

B: How long were you off your job?

BL: About three months.

B: Was there any rehabilitation or physical therapy?

BL: Yes I went through some physical therapy and then I went straight back to work. There were no transitional periods like there are now.

B: Are there any questions that I've missed that I should be asking?

BL: From a tradesman's point of view, it's not a bad place to work and it's never been a bad place to work. Management has always cooperated with us because when it comes down to it, the tradesmen sort of run the plant. If the equipment doesn't run, the plant doesn't run. I feel people in production haven't been treated as well as the people in trades over the years there. I've heard stories back in the eighties that it was hate thing. Management treated the people like animals and would

throw them out for any kind of minor infraction of the rules, and they had to fight to get their jobs back. I've never had any problems myself with management.

B: So there are not any lingering ramifications from those previous days?

BL: A lot of the older people from the sixties and seventies are still there. Myself, I was not a part of that group and was always treated pretty well.

B: If you could go back and choose between working in the steel mills and working at Lordstown as a pipe fitter which job would you choose?

BL: It's a hard question because I really enjoyed my job at the steel mill. It was a small department where I worked and we were a close-knit bunch of people there. We were basically like a family. There were only 25 people on a shift. We'd have picnics and went out after work on second shift. We'd have hot dogs and beer and go bowling every so often. We socialized a lot more, but then, we were all younger back then. Here at General Motors, we all go home and don't socialize too much. But in the eighties and early nineties I noticed at General Motors there was a lot of back stabbing going on. At the steel mill you never had that. People would tell you what they thought of you straight to your face. At Lordstown, people seem to respect those that are gutless and would talk behind people's backs and wouldn't face people with the problems that they have. Yes, I make a lot more money at Lordstown but at the steel mill they're a totally different bunch of people.

B: I'd like to say thank you for your time. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

BL: Well I hope for the future of our area, and the future of the youth, that General Motors doesn't decide to pull their plant out of this area. I think it would be a

good place for our youth to work. It's only getting better out there as long as the company doesn't push the people to extremes. Also the opportunities to increase your education and so forth are a real benefit. I think if they hang in there, and get a better product out there, we have a future.

B: Thank you.

BL: Thank you.