

YONGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

GM LORDSTOWN.

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1952

George C. Luman
Interviewed

By

Timothy Kinhead

On

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Oral History Program

Subject: GM Lordstown

OH# 1952

Interviewee: GEORGE LUMAN

Interviewer: Timothy Kinkead

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TK: This is an interview with George Luman for the Youngstown State University Oral History, General Motors Lordstown project by Timothy J. Kinkead done at George Luman's house in Austintown on February 22, 2001 at 2:30 pm. I would like to thank Mr. Luman for allowing me to come over and interview about his experiences at Lordstown. It was very gracious of you to allow me into your home to do this interview. I would first like to ask you about your parents background? What do you remember about your parents?

GL: Well, my mother was born in Pennsylvania and my dad was born down in the Southern part of Ohio. He passed away when I was five years old. So, I can't tell you much about him.

TK: Understandable.

GL: But from what I've heard he was a very fine man.

TK: I am sure he was.

GL: Mother she passed away the year before I retired.

TK: Well, what was their ethnic background? Just American or where they immigrants?

GL: No, dad was born in Germany and he came over when he was a little guy, a couple weeks old. Mother was born right here in the United States. That's all I can tell you.

TK: Yeah, that's fine. When was your birthday?

GL: January 3rd, 1927.

TK: 1927. And you were born in...

GL: In Cleveland.

TK: In Cleveland. Can you tell me anything about your childhood that you remember?

GL: No, I can't tell you much about that. All I know as I got older I loved to play baseball, ice skate, roller skate, and horse back riding, and things like that. That's about all I can tell you.

TK: I see. You went to school through out High School?

GL: No, I didn't. I dropped out in the ninth grade.

TK: What were the circumstances behind that?

GL: Well, I'd rather not talk about that.

TK: Completely understandable. Do you have any other early life experiences that stick out in your mind that you'd like to talk about.

GL: No, I can't remember any other ones.

TK: Do you have any early work experiences?

GL: Well, I worked, lets see. I worked at a gas station when I was fifteen. And from there I dropped out of school I got work on the rail roads some machine stuff and the electrical trade on the rail road. I spent seven years on the rail road and I got the bright idea that I'd go to California and get rich, which didn't happen. I was married at that time and I had my boy, so, we came back and I went to work at Alcoa up in Cleveland. I worked there four years then I went into construction and I worked there for a year. Then I got laid off for a year and was out of work for a year. Then I finally got a job at General Motors and that's where I staid.

TK: I see. Well, we'll get back to your General Motors experience in a moment. For background sake: your married?

GL: Yes.

TK: You have how many children?

GL: Three.

TK: All...

GL: All boys.

TK: All boys, what are their ages do you know off hand?

GL: 51, 45, and 40.

TK: And do you have any grandchildren to speak of?

GL: Oh I got a granddaughter and two grandson's and a great grandson.

TK: No, great grandchildren to speak of?

GL: One

TK: One great grandchild, very good. Well, looking at your individual, your background and your family life, and so forth. I have several questions to ask you about your experience of working at General Motors Lordstown. When did you start at Lordstown?

GL: December 10, 1958.

TK: That was when you started at General Motors?

GL: General, oh I am sorry

TK: Well, we can do the whole thing. You started up in General Motors up in Cleveland.

GL: Yes.

TK: In 1958?

GL: Yes.

TK: What did you do up there?

GL: I was welder maintenance.

TK: Welder. What was a typical day like being a welder?

GL: Well, that was in the assembly plant up in Cleveland. They kept us on the go. I worked on a production line up there. It could get pretty rough.

TK: Yeah, was it hectic or monotonous?

GL: No, because it was always something different.

TK: Hum.

GL: It was a good place to work. It was an old building.

TK: You said that you worked in Cleveland at General Motors Plant and then you came to Lordstown when?

GL: I came to Lordstown March 10th, 1970.

TK: Okay. Well, what department did you work at in Lordstown?

GL: Welder Maintenance.

TK: Welder maintenance too. And was the typical day at Lordstown different then it was up in Cleveland?

GL: Oh yeah a lot different. You had your big presses up in Lordstown and you didn't have to go up and down the line and that was all really different it was interesting.

TK: Well, the Lordstown plant when it first opened it was a cutting edge plant, highly automated, what were your impressions of the plant when you first got there in 1970?

GL: What was I getting into? There was no floor you had to be careful; we had to walk on planks when I first started out there. It was a big place I never thought I'd work in a place that big. As we went along it got better. You could enjoy yourself.

TK: Now you said that you walked on planks and it was fairly dangerous when you first got out there.

GL: Yeah there was no production at that time. They were just building the plant. I guess production started there around '71.

TK: Correct.

GL: We had to be careful cause if you slipped you went right down into the basement.

TK: Sounds very dangerous.

GL: Yeah.

TK: Was this the fabrication plant?

GL: The fabrication plant, yeah.

TK: Okay. How did the working conditions change over the time you spent at Lordstown? Did they improve at all?

GL: Oh yeah they improved a whole lot. After they got all the flooring and that in, we got rid of all the hard hats. They kept the plant clean, real clean. Trying to think back to it.

TK: That's quite okay if you think of anything you can bring it up later on. Not a problem. Technology as I mentioned earlier and as you probably know since you worked there was essential at Lordstown as far as producing cars and so forth. What effect did technology have on you working there?

GL: Well, when they changed the design in cars we had to change all the welding spots and places. We had to half inch or maybe three-quarters of an inch we had to on the top and the bottom and we had to line them up on the bottom and the top.

TK: I see. Well, switching gears from the production aspect of Lordstown, I think I'd like to ask you a question about: Did you get to socialize with your plant coworkers?

GL: Not outside the plant, no I didn't socialize too much.

TK: Yeah.

GL: I am the type of guy that I just as soon stay home here and stay to myself.

TK: See in the plant you were exposed to a lot of coworkers there I am assuming, did you do any kind of socialization in the plant with your coworkers?

GL: Oh yeah. Yeah, we got along good. Once in awhile we'd go and play golf not very often. But we socialized.

TK: I see. Well working at Lordstown did you have any kind of family problems or crisis that were related to working at Lordstown as far as did it put too much strain on?

GL: No. It never bothered us.

TK: Yeah. Because a lot of workers that worked at Lordstown had long hours awkward hours and so forth. So, you never had these? Well, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about the union out at Lordstown. Were you a member of the...

GL: You better believe I was.

TK: What UAW, 1112?

GL: 1714.

TK: 1714. What was a union meeting like back then UAW 1714?

GL: Union meetings were, well they told us what was going on and about the International's they kept us informed pretty good.

TK: Did the union play a central role in your life in your career when you were working at Lordstown?

GL: Now what do you mean by central?

TK: Well, while you were working there did the union, between union meeting and union activities did the union get involved in your personal life while you were working at Lordstown?

GL: No, I don't think so.

TK: No?

GL: No.

TK: Well...

GL: But they were good to us.

TK: Yeah. Did you believe that the union was looking out for your best interests?

GL: Oh, I think so very much. Because if they wasn't I wouldn't have today what I got. There still fighting wars.

TK: Good, good. Well, speaking of the union Lordstown has a fairly extensive history of radical union activity. What I mean is strikes, 1972 and ...

GL: Well, when we first started yeah. When you take a bunch of guys from different plants coming in and the foremen from different plants and they just didn't recognize UAW. They were firing employees out there left and right.

TK: Well, do any of the strikes stick out in your mind in particular? Were any particular bad point did you think that they were particularly bad?

GL: No.

TK: No?

GL: I think the longest strike we had out there was sixty days or something like that.

TK: Yeah.

GL: But ever since then we haven't had a strike out there for a long time.

TK: Yeah. It was been awhile. Personally how do you feel, you said earlier that if its wasn't for the union that you wouldn't have what you have today?

GL: The union is top notch with me. They're number one. They've given me everything that I've got. It's all paid for. We were treated better by our managers, because we had somebody to back us up and fight for us. I think that everybody should have a union.

TK: The union does seem to be the central part of working out at GM Lordstown. Being that as it may, we're you aware of anybody working out at Lordstown that wasn't a part of the union?

GL: No Sir.

TK: So, it was thoroughly unionized and still is to this day possible?

GL: Still is to this day.

TK: Now you said your son works out at GM Lordstown. Do you know what he does out there?

GL: He is an inspector. He works in the background.

TK: He being your son was he able to get into Lordstown easier you think, because he was your son and that you worked there?

GL: No. No he started up in Euclid and he worked 90 days and he went to the Air Force. When he came back he went from Euclid and started working down here. He was in the service.

TK: Since we're discussing your son right now do you like the fact that your son works at GM Lordstown? Would you prefer he do something else?

GL: No I don't think so. Actually if he went somewhere else _____ he was fresh out of high school _____.

TK: I see. Over all, what's your over all feeling about yourself working at GM Lordstown? Would there be anything you would change about the working environment up there or was everything acceptable?

GL: In our department everything was acceptable. The only thing that I didn't like, they would take the guys that would work and put all the work on them and these other kids that didn't want to work they didn't have to. That was the only thing that bugged me. I don't know how it is now.

TK: Yeah. That's a good question in its own right. How do you see GM Lordstown in the future? What do you think will happen to the plant? Any insights there?

GL: No that's hard to say, because it only takes five minutes to put a pad lock on. I don't think that they're going to close unless they can come up with a better idea on how to run it.

TK: Now you arrive at Lordstown from Euclid in 1970, what was the difference between the Euclid plant and Lordstown? Did anything stick out in your mind?

GL: Well, one was an assembly plant and the other is a fabricating plant, stamping plant. It was all together different, as far as that goes. We took a few assemblies and shipped the stuff out to different plants.

TK: Well, mindset attitude wise was there any difference between the workers at Euclid and the workers at GM Lordstown?

GL: Well, I think they were more radical out here, as far as that goes. They came in there, the new hirers thought that General Motors had given them a job, _____

like I said the younger fellows just didn't want to do the work. They wanted to get paychecks, but they didn't want to do the work.

TK: Well, then did you notice then any kind of generational gap; between the workers like yourself, a veteran GM employee, and the younger employees that were working at Lordstown?

GL: No there wasn't a generation gap.

TK: Well, do you think that perhaps the, we talked earlier about the radical nature of the more radical nature of the workers around here in relation to the workers that were up in Euclid plant, do you think that any of that has to do with the job environment around the Mahoning Valley? Especially after the Steel Mills closed? Do you think that played any part in the attitude?

GL: That could have been some of it, yeah. I don't think it's all of it though. I think guys were afraid that they were going to lose their jobs.

TK: One question back to the union. Do you still attend meetings regularly?

GL: Yes. We have a retirees meeting, we have them once a month, the third Monday of each month. March, April, and May and then we're off in June till September. Then we have them from September until December.

TK: I guess we should clarify this one. You retired from Lordstown when exactly?

GL: 1989, May first.

TK: Okay. Have you attend meetings regularly then since you've retired? Is the union still active with the retirees?

GL: Oh yes. They are still active with us, our president he comes to all of our meetings. Benefits man is there and he tells us and explains the different changes in our benefits. I think they do a pretty good job of informing us.

TK: Well, are there any other details you think that are worth mentioning? About your experiences at working at GM Lordstown or for that matter the Euclid Plant. You could bring up anything that you think.

GL: I think of anything that sticks out.

TK: Do you think that Lordstown was a good place to work?

GL: I think so. I think it was. Well, I can't say it for the assembly plant, the assembly plant after we got it running for a couple of years I think it was a good place to work. I enjoyed it.

TK: I think it sounds like an intriguing place to see in action. Well, I believe that concludes our interview. I would like to thank you again for taking the time to tell about your experiences at

working at Lordstown and I wish you good luck in your retirement and thank you for being a gracious host.

GL: Thank you for being so good.

TK: This is Tim Kinkead YSU Oral History Program signing off.