

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

GM Lordstown Project

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1942

DUANE L. METZ

Interviewed

On

April 10, 2001

By

Stacy Fortner

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: DUANE METZ
INTERVIEWER: Stacy Fortner
SUBJECT: GM Lordstown Project
DATE: April 10, 2001

SF: This is an interview with Duane Metz for the Youngstown State University Oral History GM Lordstown Project by Stacy Fortner at 1948 Farmdale Avenue, Mineral Ridge, Ohio on April 10th at 3:00 pm.

SF: Why don't we just start to talk about your childhood and your parents and what kinds of jobs your parents had and whether they were from this area or where they were from?

DM: Okay well my mom and dad are both from out west, they were both born in Kansas. They got married in I think 1935, my dad has been deceased since 1972 and my mom is living and she is in a nursing home. My dad always did road construction out west and he worked on The Hoover Dam. The progress was moving east so they moved east and settled in Lisbon, Ohio, that is where I grew up at, that is where I was born and raised. And he was a bulldozer operator for a strip mine up until he retired and he dies a

couple of years later. And when I was in high school I started to work in a grocery store, I started on my 16th birthday and I worked there all through high school until about a year after high school. Then I worked in Salem, Ohio at a Stamping Plant named Mullins and I worked there for about six months and then I went to work for General Motors in May of 1969.

SF: Okay and how did you get your job at GM?

DM: Oh I just came up and put in an application, but the place I worked at had really bad wages and it was very dangerous, so about once a week I would come up and put an application in. So that is how I got hired.

SF: Okay what department did you work in?

DM: In the body shop that is where I started out at. In that shop in the car plant.

SF: And what other department have you worked in?

DM: I've worked in trim and back in body shop and back in trim. That's all of the departments I've worked.

SF: Describe a typical day at the plant.

DM: Describe it?

SF: You can start when you first started.

DM: Well when I first started, it was so big, when I first walked in I was like wow, it was so big and so fast. It was huge. You know when you start at a new school and you don't know anybody and you're afraid that you'll get lost; it was very, very overwhelming. Like I said I worked in the body shop. I worked afternoons so I would come in early and I made sure that I wasn't late, I'd leave the house early so that I wouldn't be late and I worked on the side line, I was a spot welder and just worked on the side of the car.

SF: How about, did things change after you were there for a while? Like any improvements that were done to make your job easier?

DM: Well I did several jobs, that's the thing, I think that was the problem there, the more seniority you got, the better the opportunity for better jobs. So yes, things changed after a couple of years. I got some really good jobs. I always liked working afternoons, so since I worked afternoons seniority was better on afternoons, as I always had a good job then and then I went to afternoons steady, and I worked on the assembly line where you work off of the line and you assemble parts off the line, I did sub-assemble jobs for almost twenty years. I did side glass and then windshields, they were always good jobs.

SF: Did you socialize with people that you worked with?

DM: Oh yes, we had some friends that we used to bowl with and play softball with and we'd go out with them. I skied with them, in fact about everyone that we know is from work.

SF Well that is good. How did you handle the stress that was on the line, when you were working on the line was there a lot of stress, how did you handle it?

DM: There was a lot of stress; I always thought that the best way to handle it was to not worry about it. Just come in and do your job and go home. I did that for thirty years, I know people who would get up in the morning and be upset all day about oh my God, how am I going to work, how am I going to get by, oh my God I only have four hours until I have to go to work, by the time they got to work they were exhausted. I never did that; I just went to work, did my job and went home. I found out that if you do your job the best that you could possibly do and you didn't worry about anything else, it just flew by. A lot of people don't look at it that way.

SF: What role would you say has the union had in your life while working at the plant?

DM: Well thank god for the union, I would not have been able to retire after thirty years because when I first started I know that they didn't have the Thirty and Out Program. I got the jobs I got because of seniority, and seniority is the number one priority of unions, to protect the seniorities. So I say that the union did a lot for us.

SF: How did the steel mills closing impact the plant?

DM: I don't think it had a real affect on this plant. I don't think it does at all; it was just bad for the valley. When I first started out you could always go to work for General

Motors or go to work for the steel mills, I mean everybody could get hired at the steel mills. Now it isn't like that, now you are lucky if you get into General Motors and the mills really aren't hiring at all. So it has really changed in the thirty years since I first started working there.

SF: When you were working the line what did you talk about?

DM: We talked about sports and movies and families and what you did over the weekend and how things are; we never plotted to overthrow General Motors or anything like that. I think that's how it was, it was just friends who talked about other friends and if you had kids you might talk about all the things that your kids had done or whatever. When I was hired in I remember the babies, when everybody's babies were born and now they are all grandparents now.

SF: Are you aware of any of the events that occurred during the strike, were you there?

DM: Yeah I was there; I was on strike for ten years I think, in 1970. It was pretty hard we had just been married and we were still in an apartment and we had house payments and my wife Brenda, was working, so that was pretty hard for us then. Then there were a couple of periods when we were on strike for two or maybe three weeks so that wasn't too bad. You knew what was coming so you could set some money aside. Then maybe one time we had a walk out for about four days or something like that.

SF: Were there any events that occurred during this strike?

DM: To me personally? No I just was called out to do my picketing, I did my picket duty and other than that I just stayed away.

SF: How were your worker management relationships, have they improved over the last few years?

DM: Oh yes.

SF: How have they improved?

DM: Now they communicate, before they were the enemies, and you would go in and have nothing to do with them at all. Like I said I used to always just do my job, I would never ever talk to a foreman, I would never say how are you because he would do the same to me. We used to be in the cafeteria, and they had their own cafeteria as opposed to ours. About twenty years ago or so they started changing all of that, and they got more involved and they had all of their team meeting and they listened to what the worker had to say and they are not your enemies now, you know they aren't your enemies like they were before.

SF: Did you become friends with any of the management?

DM: Just in the plant, not outside of it. Some of the foreman I really liked, they were really nice, and there were other foreman that you couldn't stand, it all depended on whom you worked with. The ones that I liked and worked with them, I got along with them the whole time, the ones I didn't like I never ever liked them. I had trouble with them and their personalities, you just didn't get along, and you hated him forever.

SF: Do you remember any unsafe working conditions or any problems that developed?

DM: No, the union was excellent about that and anytime you would see anything, they would get right on it. And management that same thing, we would point out something like on a warehouse rack and parts that were hanging over or the outrigger that would

support or hold the stock if it was loose we'd tell somebody and they would get on it right away. So I never really saw unsafe health issues. At least any lingering unsafe issues, anything that was pointed out to them was taken care of.

SF: Are there any new and improved conditions at the mill or at the plant?

DM: Yeah, I think the union helped a lot. They both did, management realized that they needed the union and the union realized that they needed management because without management there would be no plant. I think they both changed it. There was a period in the seventies, I think it was called GMAD or something like that and when they came in, when General Motors came in they were terrible, they fought and that was when there were strikes and you had all of the wildcats, it was horrible. That whole period, but that whole mentality is since gone.

SF: Were the later strikes that occurred in 1982 and 1984 were they related to the earlier one, the one that occurred in the seventies?

DM: I don't remember those, they must not have been too serious, but seriously I don't remember what the strikes were for in '84, I'm sorry. They must not have lasted very long.

SF: Would you want your children or grandchildren working at GM?

DM: I don't have any children, but it is a good way to make a living. I did not go to college, I just went from high school without any kind of advanced education, and I made a really good wage and was able to retire when I was 51. So it was really good, there is nothing wrong with working at General Motors.

SF: And how do you feel about working at GM? What are your feelings about your experiences that you had there?

DM: Well I am glad I had it. I have a lot of good memories from it. I enjoyed my time, I had a lot of fun, I made a lot of great friends, a couple of incidences in thirty years, but nothing too critical, over all I'd have to say that it was a very good deal.

SF: Did you ever experience or witness anybody being discriminated against at the plant?

DM: No, I never did, racial, not at all. No, I really don't think I ever did. Women started being hired in the early seventies and I never saw any trouble at all with that. I'd say no.

SF: How do you feel most proud about your work at GM?

DM: What?

SF: What do you feel the most proud about?

DM: Well I feel that I put my thirty years in and I'd say I worked everyday, I don't think, I bet in the last twenty years I didn't miss a day of work because of sickness. I'd say my most proud thing is that I just went in and did my job and you could count on me, I was there everyday.

SF: Is there anything you would like to talk about or mention?

DM: No, I think I'm done, overall my experience at General Motors was fine, I mean it was work, I always felt that way that there is a reason that they pay you to do it, instead of you paying them, it's not supposed to be fun. It's a job. No, I can't think of anything negative about it.

SF: Okay, thank you.