

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
GM Lordstown

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O.H. 1951

Harry Love
Interviewed
By
Timothy J. Kinkean
On
April 20, 2001

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INTERVIEWEE: HARRY LOVE

INTERVIEWER: Timothy J. Kinkean

SUBJECT: GM Lordstown

DATE: April 20, 2001

K: This is an interview with Harry Love for the Youngstown State University Oral History and Center for Working Class Studies by Tim Kinkean at Harry Love's house in Austintown on April 20, 2001 at 2:30pm. This project is sponsored by the Ford Foundation. First of all I'd like to thank Mr. Love for allowing me to interview him. I'd like to start off by asking you about your parents. What can you tell me about your parents?

L: Both of my parents were born and raised in Youngstown. My father worked in the steel mill for thirty years then retired from there and went to work at a bank for a few years. He worked there until her retired and passed away at the age of eighty-two. My mother was a housewife.

K: When were you born?

L: In 1939.

K: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

L: I have two younger brothers there are five years between us.

K: How did you get along with your brothers?

L: Fine, I still do. Both of them live here in town. One worked at General Motors he's retired too. The other drove semi for the Tamarkin Company in town. He's also retired.

K: How would you say you got along with your parents?

L: Fine, I didn't have any problems.

K: What do remember about your school experiences?

L: I graduated from the Rayen School in Youngstown. I had a good time at school. I played football and basketball. I had a lot of good friends in high school. I went to Youngstown State for a short time then I ended up getting married and went to work. Then I went back to the college for a while for about seven or eight years on and off but I never finished.

K: When did you graduate from high school?

L: In 1957.

K: Do you have any hobbies?

L: I enjoy fishing. I used to play a lot of golf but I had to give it up due to hand injuries from work and things like that but I still manage to get a little fishing in.

K: What year did you get married?

L: I got married in 1958.

K: You said you moved from Youngstown to Austintown?

L: I went to Youngstown State for a while.

K: Did you graduate?

L: No.

K: After Youngstown State where did you go?

L: I went to work for the Youngstown Board of Education for a couple of years as an assistant custodian, then I worked at the Fowler Construction Company for a few years doing work at Youngstown Sheet and Tube, then I went to work for United Engineering in Youngstown. I was there for about nine years then I went to work at Lordstown and I worked there for twenty-six years.

K: What year did you start work at Lordstown?

L: In March of 1971.

K: Before we start talking about Lordstown I would like to ask you a few questions about your wife. You got married in 1958?

L: Yes.

K: How many children do you have?

L: Four children, two daughters and two sons.

K: Do you know their ages off hand?

L: Forty-two, forty, thirty-seven, and twenty-five.

K: Any grandchildren?

L: I have four granddaughters. Eleven, eight, six and four.

K: Back to Lordstown you started in 1971. What can you tell me about how you got hired at Lordstown?

L: It was through a friend of mine that was working there at the time. My son and his son were involved in cub scouts together. He managed to get me an interview and from there on in I got hired out there and went to work in March of 1971 and I stayed there until June of 1995.

K: What department did you work there?

L: It was classified as hard trim. Mainly putting body trim on the cars, rubber molding, door pads, window glass, interior mechanisms for your window cranks and automatic windows, carpets, headliners and any of the interior and some of the exterior chrome.

K: How would you describe a typical day?

L: Long. Strenuous on the body. Most of the time you're working with heavy air guns and just the torque of the guns like putting in seatbelts and stuff like that was very strenuous. We were working on average from ten to eleven hours a day.

K: Forced overtime?

L: Yes, and usually Saturdays too and that was mandatory also. I made good money there was no doubt about it that you made a good living working there but you didn't get to spend as much time with your family as a result of that. I literally had to take off work if I wanted to see a ball game that the boys were playing in or if the girls were playing in any sports. Other than that it wasn't all that bad.

K: How did you deal with the stress and monotony?

L: With the help of my family. I tried to be involved with my family. My wife was very helpful with a lot of things. I came home when I needed rest. We didn't bicker. Everybody really pitched in. It helped a lot with the stress at work.

K: What kind of interaction did you have with your coworkers at Lordstown? Was there much?

L: A little. Some were affiliated with the golf league or went fishing and hunting with buddies. It all depended on if you had the extra time to do it. I had a few good friends out there. You moved around quite a bit. Most people kept trying to

switch just to get to an easier job or less strenuous but you never knew how it was going to end up until you got to it.

K: No matter where you moved though you still ended up on the assembly line?

L: Yes.

K: From what I know about the assembly line it tended to move fast and you had a preset amount of time to do your job before it would move on and do it again.

L: That's right. You had so many minutes to complete a job or so many seconds and the car would move on to the next job. If you completed it, then good, if not, you moved a little down the line trying to complete but then you were running into the next person's job so you had to get out of the way and go back and somebody would have to pick up what you didn't get in the repair station.

K: What kind of problems did you run into on the assembly line? Did you adjust quickly or did it tend to take you awhile?

L: It took awhile most of the time but eventually you'd get used to it.

K: I think it would be very difficult to get used to that kind of hectic pace. Speaking of that were the conditions safe in your opinion?

L: Some were and some weren't. It was just too fast a pace at times. A lot of times you'd trip and fall so you'd have to be careful and be on your guard and really pay attention.

K: How difficult was it to be mindful and pay attention to all the potential dangers around you when faced with this kind of job?

L: A lot of times you couldn't talk to people around you and certain jobs you really had to watch your hands so a little concentration was needed on some stuff. In

the meantime you're trying to talk to someone across from you so it could get involved. But you had to talk to people to break up the monotony of standing there in the same position all night long car after car after car. It could get awful boring at times.

K: What kind of injuries did you suffer while working at Lordstown are there any that you can speak of?

L: Yes, I suffered some injuries on my hands and ended up with carpal tunnel syndrome in both wrists, ulnar nerve entrapment in my elbow, back injuries from falling, and torn muscles in my upper arm from the repetitive stretching. It ended up causing me to leave there a little earlier than I had anticipated. I had to leave there on disability because I could no longer function and do the job that I would have had to do.

K: I'd like to talk about the friends that you made at the plant. What kind of things did you do together at the plant or outside of work?

L: At the plant sometimes we would sit down on break and play cards or talk or whatever. Then outside of the plant we'd play golf or go hunting or fishing. We had a little interaction with family but mostly it was individual. Some of our families got to be friends and we'd go out occasionally to dinner or to union dances and stuff like that. I still see some of them today.

K: That sounds like a good benefit of working out there. How did working out there impact your family life?

L: Primarily it impacted us most when I worked second shift. When the kids were still in school and involved in after school activities or home from school I saw

nothing of them for literally days on end. I'd be leaving for work when they were in school or I'd go to work at wee hours in the morning so sometimes I wouldn't see them for three or four days at a time. I also worked on Saturdays so I would get to see them on Sunday for a little while and that was it.

K: How often did they lay-off out there?

L: Lay-offs weren't real frequent but when they did there were times when we were off over a year.

K: How did you survive? Unemployment?

L: There was unemployment and you had supplemental benefits for a while. When that ran out they had periods when they extended the unemployment for a little bit then there were times when it ran out all together and you worked wherever you could and did what you could.

K: Did your wife work at all?

L: No.

K: Do you have any regrets about working out there and not seeing your wife and kids as much?

L: You miss some of it but I guess it's that way with anything anymore. I watch my kids with their kids and they're in different jobs and they aren't home much either. So I guess that's the way it goes. You can't always be there. It's even more so now with both parents working. I was lucky that my wife didn't have to work.

K: Do you recall the Vega? There was a controversy about it because the car wasn't very successful. The management blamed the workers and the workers blamed management. What are your recollections about it?

L: I started there right about the time that they started building the Vega in 1971. The line speed was very fast. It was over a hundred and some jobs an hour. Since then they've cut that way back. I think they realized that they were wrong trying to build it so fast and weren't building the car they should have been building. They produced those cars for eight years. There were a lot of them on the road but there aren't too many of them left now. I owned one. It wasn't a bad car. They were a little too small and compact for me as far as I was concerned but other than that they weren't the best or the worst.

K: From what I read I heard they had problems with the body's rusting out in the first year.

L: The doors rusted out tremendously as well as underneath. The brake pads were very small and didn't hold out long. There were a number of things that they were trying to change to a smaller car after years of a big car and I think they were learning a lot of things too like how to design them. The new small cars have come a long way since the Vega.

K: I have no complaints about my car. I have a 1998 Cavalier.

L: I think the Cavalier is a fine car.

K: I like it it's a nice car. It wasn't too expensive.

L: That's it it's a good car for younger people to buy today.

K: Seeing as how the unions seem to be a very important aspect of working out at Lordstown. I thought I'd ask you a couple questions about the Union. Which local were you a member of?

L: Local 1112.

K: What year did you join the union?

L: When I started. As soon as it's possible you join the union. Approximately ninety days before you were accepted into the company. There was a thirty-day period then you were in the union.

K: What role has the union played in your career at GM Lordstown.

L: They kept your wages up to par and really tried to help a lot of the things that were wrong. For example, overworking the people and getting the jobs more ergonomically suitable. All the medical benefits, injury claims, medications there were a lot of things that a lot of places don't have even today that the union got for us over the years. Every year we got a little more, it makes a big difference in your lifestyle.

K: I know you're retired do you still go to union meetings?

L: Yes, once a month.

K: How would you describe the union's role in your life now that you're retired?

L: They have different things out there, for example sometimes there are nurses out there that do your blood pressure checks and different organizations will replace hearing aid batteries and check your hearing all free of charge. If you have any medical problem you can go to your representative at the meeting and they'll try and help you out. Also you get to visit with people that you know or haven't seen

in a while. They have a meeting every month with a luncheon for the retirees. I think there are more retirees than people working in the plant now.

K: Really?! That's a sign of changing times I guess. We've learned in our class that the union in the 1970's had a couple of wildcat strikes. Do you think the union compared to other UAW locals around the country has been stronger for the workers?

L: Yes, but it was the workers that stood up for themselves as well. They were the ones fighting and being more active. I think that's what kept it going and kept it as strong as it was. I don't think there is anything like that today as far as the radical behavior back in the seventies. It's changed quite a bit.

K: I think the power of the unions have decreased with time. Why do you think the union back in the seventies was as outspoken as it was?

L: It was probably the leadership of the union at the time. We had some very good union leaders. I think Al Alli was one of the best union representatives we could have had in this valley.

K: What recollections do you have of him?

L: If you needed help you could call on Al and he'd be more than glad to try and help you.

K: How would you say that you feel overall about the union?

L: I'd hate to see the union go by the wayside.

K: Do you think it will?

L: It's going down slowly but surely. I don't think it will go away completely but it seems a lot of places are losing their unions. It's not as strong as it used to be.

K: Yes, the deck is stacked against the union. How do you feel about working at GM Lordstown? The time you spent there?

L: Ok that's all. Just ok.

K: Would there be anything you would change if you could do it all over again? Any aspect of the job?

L: There are a lot of aspects of the job that I would have liked to have changed but I can't do that today. I wish I had all my body parts functioning the way they did twenty years ago. Those are things I'd like to change but I can't.

K: Would you want one of your sons or daughters to work out there?

L: No. Three of them went to college and they use their heads instead of their bodies. My one son did work out there a short time while he was going to college in the summer and he said that was the one thing that kept him in college. Working there a short while was enough to make him stay in college.

K: If you could go back twenty-six years would you work there again?

L: I don't know. I would have probably finished school.

K: Do you have any recollections that you would like to share?

L: Not really.

K: I think that wraps it up. I would like to thank you again for allowing me to interview you in your home.

L: You're welcome. I'm glad to have you and to help you out.

K: Thanks again. This is Tim Kinkean with the YSU Oral History Program signing off.