

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
GM LORDSTOWN

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O.H. 2017

Joe A. Sigurani
Interview
By
Kristina M. Murphy
On
May 14, 2001

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INTERVIEWEE: Joe A. Sigurani

INTERVIEWER: Kristina A. Murphy

SUBJECT: GM Lordstown Project

DATE: March 14, 2001

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KM: This is Kristina Murphy doing an interview for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program and The Center for Working Class Studies. This project is funded by the Ford Foundation. Today is Wednesday, March 14, 2001. I am here today with Mr. Joseph Sigurani. I would like to thank Mr. Sigurani for inviting me here today to interview him for this General Motors, Lordstown Project. I am here today with Mr. Sigurani, and we are going to start by talking about your parents and your family background, and maybe you first want to start out with where you were born.

JS: I was born in Puerto Rico. My father came to New York in the 1950's, early, or I should say later 40's. He came here to look for work, and he did work in New York with the Coca-Cola Company delivering Coke to stores and things like that. Then he worked in a restaurant, and then when he found out about the steel mills he moved to Ohio, and acquired a job at Youngstown Sheet and Tube. Then he sent for us, I was seven. We moved to New York. Then we lived in New York where I went to school for two years. Dad was already here in Youngstown working. And then when he got settled down over here, we moved to Ohio, the whole family.

KM: What year were you born in?

JS: I was born in 1942.

KM: And what city in Puerto Rico?

JS: I was born in Utuado, it's a small town close to Ponce which is a big city, other side of the island.

KM: So your father came here in the early fifties?

JS: Well I would say maybe in 48'.

KM: When your parents came to the area, and you came as a family how many siblings did you have?

JS: We had three of us, two brothers and one sister, and there was one brother born here, who has since he passed away. He was the youngest when he passed away. He was thirty-nine.

KM: Your father got a job at Youngstown Sheet and Tube. Did your mother work?

JS: She was always a housewife; she worked at home.

KM: Did your father retire from Youngstown Sheet and Tube?

JS: He retired from Sheet and Tube, he worked there thirty years.

KM: When you came here to Youngstown what schools did you attend?

JS: I went to Sacred Heart Elementary for several years, Catholic school. Then I went to Roosevelt, then I went to East.

KM: And you graduated from East?

JS: No, then I went to Wilson, and graduated from Wilson.

KM: And what was school like for you, was it different than in Puerto Rico?

JS: Well I in Puerto Rico I had a few years of grade school, and it was just like here. I had some pretty decent teachers it was pretty good.

KM: Did you learn English here?

JS: I learned English here, of course down in Puerto Rico they do teach a little English, I knew a few words all ready. Not much.

KM: When you came to Youngstown where were you living?

JS: We lived on Pecan Street, just down the road from here.

KM: On the East Side?

JS: Yes, always on the East Side.

KM: Did you live there long?

JS: We lived there until I was about, in seventh or sixth grade. Then my dad bought this house and we moved here. This is where we were teenagers here, we grew up here at this house here.

KM: This is 140 Byron?

JS: 140 Byron yes.

KM: When you were a child were there a lot of Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood? Do you remember any activities from the neighborhood?

JS: No there wasn't that many at the time in the 50's. There was just a handful of Hispanic Puerto Ricans, and we used to hang around together. You know go places together and we rode bikes, together, and played together, and that was about it.

KM: Were you a member of St. Rose Church?

JS: Later on, well I would say when I was about probably, because we went to catechism at a church in Campbell, and What was the name of the church, Dad? The church was St. Joseph in Campbell. Since we really were the first Puerto Ricans in the area that church was more or less different nationalities of people used it. But we used in on Sundays we attended 10:30 mass. Then the Lima church came afterwards, which was right here on the East side. Since then the church was knocked down, and they have the new church in Campbell, which is St. Lima.

KM: Are you married?

JS: Yes.

KM: How many children do you have?

JS: I have two, two boys.

KM: And there age?

JS: Joe is thirty-five and Tony is twenty-eight.

KM: Were they raised on the East side?

JS: No, they were raised mostly in the Boardman area, North Lima.

KM: Did they graduate from Boardman?

JS: They graduated from Cardinal Mooney, which was a Catholic school.

KM: Do you have any grandchildren?

JS: Since interview, I have one grandchild, a grandson

KM: And you still live in the Boardman area?

JS: No, since then I have moved, well since I worked at General Motors, I lived in a lot of areas. I lived in Warren, Austintown because, it was close to work. Then I opened a business in Poland, a music business, so I moved to Poland because it was closer.

KM: And what years did you have the music business?

JS: I had the music business for eighteen years.

KM: And is it still open now?

JS: We moved, from Poland. We moved to Salem, Ohio, because, we needed a bigger space, a bigger building.

KM: So you have a business in Salem now. Before GM do you have any other work experiences?

JS: Before General Motors I worked at Aluminum Extrusion Companies, and before that I worked on farms. You know like all kids do; picking strawberries, and whatever during the summer vacation.

KM: In high school?

JS: Yes. We always worked, me and my brother, always went and worked on farms in Northeast Pennsylvania close to the lake. We spent all summer over there working.

KM: Do you know around exactly what years?

JS: That would be probably in the early, oh around 59', 60'.

KM: How and when did you get hired at GM?

JS: I was working at a meatpacking plant in Salem, Ohio, which was called A and P Warehouse. I submitted my application through the mail, and I got hired.

KM: What year were you hired?

JS: I was hired in August, 1967.

KM: What department did you start in?

JS: I started to work in Labor on the line.

KM: Have you worked in other areas?

JS: After that, I was working a lot of different areas in the plant, I ended up in the area called Salvage Department, where they did all the recycling of parts that were not good, broken, or damaged in any way. From there, I stayed there for quite a while, GM put out a lot of schooling for us to go to school. They started to move for better quality work, and reducing the work force. They offered a computer schooling in different areas, and I did it, and kept moving up until I got into one called Parts Quality Control.

KM: Parts called Quality Control?

JS: Yes, and I worked there for many years. It was actually not Parts Quality, that was later, it was like Inspection Department. What we did was we went out and took pictures of damaged parts that came in shipment, damaged during transit, and fill out reports, so they would recover their money from damage parts. That become Parts Quality Control. They kept changing names, and you know more education, more schooling, more things to do, more paperwork. That was what I did.

KM: Let's go back a little bit before GM, you said you worked at a meat packaging warehouse for A and P, and then before that you worked for the aluminum company?

JS: Yes.

KM: Do you know approximately how many years you worked for aluminum?

JS: Both places probably a year or two in each of the places at the most, because they were just paying like a dollar twenty-five an hour in those days, and I already had a little family going. I had a wife and child.

KM: What year did you get married?

JS: I got married in 1961.

KM: Are you still working currently at GM, or are you retired?

JS: Well I retired, I took the early retirement, because you had the option to do that, at that time, which was seven years ago. I have since returned to work at GM as a Rep. for another company that makes parts for General Motors. I am basically doing the same work that I was doing for General Motors, checking their parts, making sure everything is to specifications and I send them reports. Now I only work two or

three hours a day.

KM: So you started out on the assembly line, did some salvaging work, repairing parts and then you moved up with some schooling, and did inspection of parts. When you first retired from GM is that the department you retired from?

JS: Yeah I retired from Parts Quality Control Department.

KM: Did you find that it was easy to move within the company, to acquire different jobs?

JS: It was very good. The company was very good to me, and it allowed other people to get better jobs. We worked hard and tried to do our work. We had our little arguments and things, you know like anywhere else, but overall we did the work and everything got accomplished. That was the way it was supposed to be. There were no problems. The union was good, of course when we started, though, we didn't have a union, we worked. It started in 67', but the union was getting ready to get organized. In 66' and 67' there were a lot of strikes, and we would walk out and things like that. Once the union got organized, we got to work steady.

KM: You said now you only work two to three hours a day for a company that's affiliated with GM?

JS: Right.

KM: Can you describe though before you retired what a typical workday would have been like? Even on the line or anything that you remember.

JS: What we did or how did it go?

KM: Yes, did you work, say how many hours or..?

JS: We were working, at the time I retired, I was working ten four which is ten hours a day forty hours a week. They keep changing, things have changed, there wouldn't be three shifts, you know a lot of things changing.

KM: Can you describe what a day would be like?

JS: Coming in the morning, punch in, go right to your job, you had to be there at least a minute or two so you could get prepared to start working, everything would be ready for you. All the parts would be there, there would be people who brought the parts in right to your work area, and you would get your gloves and your apron, if you needed that, and as soon that siren went off the line started, and you had maybe a minute or so to work in every car that went by. If you missed a part or something like or you didn't get it they had inspectors down the line that would check your job over and make sure you did everything, and that you didn't miss anything. If there

was something missing or something not right they would write it up and then have the care keeper fixes it, once they looked at the paper work. The you get breaks, you know a twenty something minute break after you worked four hours. Then after a few more hours you would get lunch, half an hour lunch, you would get another twenty-minute break and then you would be out of there. It not easy, a lot of people thinks it's easy to work the line, but you walk and a lot it's a mental thing. The way they have it now you hardly have time to read because there is less time to work on the car. They got it down to seconds now. I think it's maybe fifty seconds on a car or something like that.

KM: You had to work swing shifts?

JS: No, once you were on the shift you stayed on the shift, usually. I was on days for a long while, I would say maybe six or seven years, and then I went to second shift, because I was bumped. Somebody had more seniority than me, so I stayed on night shift for about ten years. Then I went back to days when I had in twenty years seniority.

KM: Was the night shift hard on you and your family? I mean you family life?

JS: I don't know it was like, we made it fun. Actually, at that, what they called second shift was only afternoon shift. At that time there was only two shifts, first shift and second shift, we didn't have three shifts at that time in the beginning. We came home around one o' clock in the morning one-thirty something like that we got off.

KM: What years did they add the third shift?

JS: Third shift has been on, for probably I would say seven, eight, nine years around there.

KM: If you could describe you job in one word what would it be and why?

JS: It was good work, both of my kids made it through college, it was because I was working at General Motors, and I had the money to help them go to college. I'm not saying you make that much money to make it college, because they had to work too to make. You don't make that much money at General Motors, a lot of people think we make a lot of money out there, but we don't. When we started working there it was like, I believe, two ninety an hour when we first began to work at General Motors, and it took a lot of time to get more than that you know five cents, ten cents. If people are making fifteen dollars an hour now whatever, it took thirty years to get there. A lot of people don't think about that.

KM: That's very true.

JS: Yeah there are guys making fifteen dollars an hour; we started making two ninety an hour maybe less sometimes.

KM: How have the working conditions changed over time?

JS: The working conditions were, it was a while back thirty years, so everything was just in the move. There was new machines coming in, people were doing more manual work, so it was hard, because some of the stuff that was heavy like door and things like that had to be moved by hand. Now they have machines and things that help them move those things around, they were very heavy. But that's the way it was we were just going up, learning and then they started getting the robots and all that. That cost a lot of people to be laid off too. You made improvements in everything, but those machines took jobs away from people too.

KM: Right, so technology has changed. So you feel it has then affected the job?

JS: Oh sure, the machines really cut, I would say more than fifty percent of the workers at least, maybe more I think. There was a lot more people working there before. I mean right now there is only like five thousand including supervision, before it was like ten to twelve thousand.

KM: Did it make the job easier?

JS: The machines? Yeah well they do the dirty work, the machines do the dirty work. They do the welding, and some of the painting, but when it comes down to it people lost jobs. People are still getting fired, but it's cost saving for General Motors.

KM: Yes, I know quite well. Did you socialize with other people that you worked with inside the plant, outside?

JS: Yeah we socialized, there wasn't too many Hispanics working in the plant, still there's not many of those guys working, and I think maybe the Hispanic organizations are not doing what they're suppose to do to make sure there is equality in hiring. You know General Motors anywhere any department or supervision or anywhere. There is hardly and Hispanics doing anything out there, because they don't get hired. We were lucky to get hired there, me my brother, and the other guys, we were all in high school together. In those days the hiring was not as strict as it is today. The unemployment offices don't do anything for people. They could never find you a job, there still like that. They should close them all down, but you know the organizations like OCCCHA, they're not doing their work.

KM: Do you feel they need to recruit more in our community..?

JS: They need to recruit more people that are more outgoing, you know do more investigation and get things moving. Things are not moving for the Hispanic community.

KM: Do you feel that there is, it was easier for you to move within the company

regardless that you were Hispanic?

JS: Well when I was there it was fine. There's prejudice wherever you go. I look at that as, because it happens to everybody. It doesn't matter who you are, but you're a small group they are going to look down on you. That's the way it is for some reason. It's like a natural thing wherever you go.

KM: Did you encounter any of that discrimination at the job?

JS: You know, I hate to bring all that stuff out, but the job no. GM was good, I had no problem with that, it was just with some of the workers. Some of the workers, but not very many though, just very few. That's probably maybe just natural, maybe the guys don't like me. There is some people I didn't like so I didn't talk to them either. I didn't start no fights with them or call them names or anything. It was pretty good working out there. You know once your in there, but you know to get in there is the thing, that's why I imagine. They can't get everybody to work if you don't have the right education, like they're looking for people that have at least a high school diploma, and a little bit of college. I suppose there is a lot of Hispanics out there that haven't gotten what my kids do. My son has a degree and he can't get in there. So my other son just got out of town and went to California, he got a real good job out there.

KM: Kids are leaving.

JS: Yeah, they're leaving, my other son is going to leave too. Young people are moving out. They were raised here, educated here, spent all our money here going to school.

KM: You said that you started there from the beginning basically, so when other people came from other plants, that maybe came to Lordstown from other GM plants, did you notice any treatment or they way they were treated? Were they accepted right away?

JS: Yeah they were accepted. I think things went pretty smooth, there was just a transition time from the beginning there, when they opened up, and I think in 65', I wasn't there, but I think that's really when they started to move the plant. In 66' they started to work, that's when my brother got hired, and I came in 67'. People were accepted okay, there was no big deal all the nationalities got along good, just a few people here and there, that always. I don't think it was prejudice for certain groups, everybody got along really well.

KM: So did you have friends that you worked with that you socialized with outside the the plant?

JS: Yeah, I have black friends, Puerto Rican friends, and white friends.

KM: What kind of activities did you guys do outside of the plant? Were they company

sponsored or union sponsored, or just personal things?

JS: We went to the Hispanic things, like the dances, because they used to have a lot of things like that. Family things, dancing, techniques and things like that.

KM: So the Hispanic workers you worked with you mostly stayed within the Hispanic community and did activities.

JS: Right.

KM: Did you ever partake in or remember any company or union activities?

JS: Every year they have the union activity, the big one where they go to Cedar Point or one of those big parks where they rent the whole place out, and everybody is invited.

KM: Did you go?

JS: Oh yeah, I took my kids; they had a good time.

KM: Was there ever anything company sponsored you can recall?

JS: The company never had anything that I can remember.

KM: How do you feel about working at GM?

JS: It was good, I didn't mind working there at all. I got tired, but you know you got a nice paycheck, took care of business.

KM: When did you exactly retire?

JS: I retired about seven years ago.

KM: Seven years, so about 1993?

JS: Yes, something like that.

KM: What role has the union played in your life with GM?

JS: The union, they did a lot of good. They kept us working, they did what they were supposed to do. They negotiated well, especially when Al Abby was there. We worked smooth, there was very few times that we had any problems. Everybody went to work and minded their own business, did their job, and it was pretty good.

KM: So most of the activities were union?

JS: Union or personal. General Motors never had any, they had little activities, they

maybe had little shows, their new cars and this and that stuff like that. But no picnics for the workers, or anything like that I can remember. I was never invited, maybe they had them, I don't know. I don't know anything about them. The supervision at General Motor's people was great.

KM: Did you find the union helpful and necessary over the years?

JS: Oh yeah, the union keeps the workers in line, it helps the company move along. The union helps a lot. Other problems, little problems, they handle that. When they get bigger, then they have meetings with supervision and they take care of it.

KM: What did you do, like after work? Like for example we know Bill's Place in Austintown, people liked to go there.

JS: We used to go to the Pink Elephant, or we went to the Upstairs' Lounge, of course most of the time I was by myself or just one other guy. That's about it.

KM: Did you, the plant had some history of some militant unionism, especially in the early seventies, can you comment on that?

JS: Well I didn't see anything out of the ordinary, with just organization different people taking positions, different people bringing different ideas in, that were maybe not acceptable. But they vote, and it's okay. As far as I could see there was no harsh things going on like getting beat up or anything like that. It was just all meetings.

KM: Why do you think this attitude was, the time or the era? A lot has been written about this, and a lot of management first assumed it was the era, and the age that the men were coming from, the late sixties. Do you think it had to do with most of these people coming from parents who worked in the steel industry?

JS: What do you mean? It was a rough time work was different. I think the jobs got maybe easier where you don't have to lift heavy things or sweat a lot and do many different jobs. Today it's not that much labor, but there is a lot of different things to keep them busy. I'm not saying they're not doing a lot of work, there still doing a lot of work. At that time it was more because they didn't have the machines they had before.

KM: But do you think there was any kind of attitude between the union workers and the management at the time in the seventies?

JS: Well when you have that many people working, and those little things were going on all the time, but there was no big confrontations.

KM: So you don't find that it was militant at all?

JS: No. there was a lot of things written like Time Magazine, had things about drugs and

things like that but it wasn't really all that bad. There was little things going on, because in the sixties there was a lot of thing happening like that but nothing that interfered.

KM: Still the mill had a reputation for a lot of gambling haven taken place there, did you?

JS: Very little, one time they had a little gambling and they got busted right away, it didn't last long. There were no secret things going on, people didn't have time. You came to work, and you got half hour lunch, two twenty-minute breaks, and the rest of the time you were working on the line. Especially in the seventies when you were building the Vega's, they were running a hundred cars an hour, hundred and ten, that's a lot of cars. There were a lot of people working, but there was no time to fool around it was just work.

KM: There has been a lot written about the Vega, what do you think went wrong with the Vega?

JS: Well the Vega, GM put that car out to take away the VW market and we did. The Volkswagen went out of business for all those years, now they're back. The Vega was made for that, it was just a little car. It was made to be a little go-cart, to go shopping for groceries, and go here and there. It was just a little car to get around town, it wasn't made to travel to California or the highways. It was just a little car to get around. It was very reasonable, they started selling it at eighteen hundred, fifteen hundred dollars at that time. But then people wanted more luxuries, they wanted stereo systems and all these things, and prices started going up.

KM: Do you feel the problem, do you feel the workers were blamed for The Vega's problems?

JS: No, I don't think so. It's a matter of, as things get better everything else gets better. The more people learn, how to build cars, how to protect the metal better so it doesn't rust, and things like that. There was nothing, we built a lot of Vega's, that was a good car for the price. The people wanted, you know if you wanted to buy a Cadillac, you didn't buy a Vega. Vega it was just a little car to get things moving.

KM: How do you feel about the strike in 72'?

JS: The strike it was, there was little things happening, like a couple people wore covers over their face and did a couple little things, but it wasn't a hundred people it was maybe two or three people that did dumb things like that. You can't control people like that. It was just something that needed to be settled. There was some issues that needed to be settled, and you did it.

KM: Do you think there was too much pressure on the workers to produce that many cars per hour?

JS: You mean the Vega's and things like that?

KM: Right.

JS: There was no pressure, I mean people that didn't like it quit. If they couldn't handle the job, they quit. I almost quit a couple times, but I stayed there. I got tired but I like the paycheck. It's just like anything else, people work in coalmines, and I wouldn't want to go down there. There was issues, when the time is up to have a new contract, things happen. But you know something through all these years, we haven't been on strike that many times, very few times. We had a lot of walkouts in the beginnings 66' 67, and maybe 68' a little bit, because the union wasn't organized. They weren't even collecting dues or anything everything was new.

KM: In any way, talking about other strikes, like in 82' and 84' do you feel they were related to the early one in 72'?

JS: I don't think so. Everything in the plant was basically the same. It was just contract time, and there weren't, some of the people weren't quick enough to take care of business before the dead line. And that's why the strike came, because issues were not settled. But most of the time, I would say about seventy or eighty percent of the time the issues were settled before the deadline and we continued working.

KM: Do you feel that management was fair to the employees over the years, especially maybe the seventies, or do you feel that were issues that weren't addressed?

JS: They were fair, they did what they could with that many people. A lot of people had no experience with automobiles, a lot of people came in and didn't know how to put a tire on. So everyone had to be trained, they give you enough time before you start on the line, they give you somebody to work with until you learned the job. There was good supervision, you can't put everyone, there might be one supervisor that was mean, but they all aren't mean. It's just like anything else, you might have a teacher in college that's mean.

KM: Right, right. It seems like a lot of people transferred into Lordstown because, of downsizing at other plants or their closing. How were these transplants perceived by others, and did they adapt to the militant nature of the union?

JS: Well, I won't say the union was militant, I would say they treated everybody, when you put a call in and had a problem there was a procedure, and they educated you well, and you have pamphlets and books to read on how the union operated. If you had a problem with supervision or another worker you called (inaudible), get off the line, fill out paperwork what happened, and what's the problem, and it would be taken care of. Everything was taken care of, there was no harsh militant pressure or anything like that. Of course on the outside maybe the news distorted a lot things, they say things that are not, like right now with this new person taking over the plant they are writing in the newspaper things that are not the way she feels.

There are people out here who have never been in there and they write about it. It's what they think. They talk to people who are maybe mad at somebody or upset about something and they give information that is not quite accurate.

KM: So over the years you feel it's just been one or two people and that gets represented in the news?

JS: Yeah, right the news blows a lot of damage, because they don't get all the facts, and then they distort them too. Just to make it sound better and look better, you know how it is with any little story if you tell somebody they got a broken bone by the time you the tenth person get it. it is he's really smashed up, he's dead. Everybody adds a little bit to make it more exciting. That's the way it is out there. Over all I think people get along good, supervision gets along good, there may be a few people there, even in the union you might have one person who is radical, but over all everyone was working they were always getting a paycheck, and insurance benefits. It was good. We had good facilities, clean bathrooms, showers, gloves every day, they would supply the gloves and aprons, they even have gyms and everything now to work out.

KM: For employees as well as management?

JS: Yeah, of course, that's been in place for about fifteen years or so. That cost General Motors a lot to install that. There's different gyms everywhere, for this group of people here, upstairs, there's got to be at least ten to fifteen gyms in the place. Nice cafeteria, big cafeteria, have you ever been in it?

KM: No, no I haven't.

JS: You ought to take a tour.

KM: We were trying to set that up earlier.

JS: Just call security.

KM: What do you feel proudest about in your work life?

JS: Well that I made it through there, I'm retired, I'm getting my benefits, and I'm getting taken care of.

KM: Everything was beneficial to you?

JS: Yeah sure, I worked and I was rewarded.

KM: And you progressed?

JS: I progressed, my family progressed.

KM: You had opportunity to move up in your job as well?

JS: Yes.

KM: Would you want your sons to work there at Lordstown?

JS: Yeah, now they are into different fields now, but maybe when they got out of college, I wish they would have been able to get in there, and move up the ladder. It's just like anything else, not everyone could get in. What are you going to do? You put your application in and some people make it and some don't. And they try everything, like now when they hired last time, because it's hard. I'll give you an example, when they hired before the hiring practice before were easier for people, you know for the average person, because you went to the plant and you filled out an application, and they did it manually. But then later on when they did that they started to get to many people. And it would cause problems, because the last time they did it, I remember it was maybe fifteen years ago, but they had so many people come out to the plant, I think it was twenty thousand people, but they just had lines of people in the parking lot, like maybe five lines of people trying to get into the plant, they waited there all night long and the line went all the way to the highway. We came into work we had a hard time parking because of so many people. So what happened was some people got injured, because there's glass in the front doors, and I guessed somebody pushed somebody and after that I didn't see what happened, and they went through the glass and people got hurt so GM quit hiring people that way. The then they went to the employment offices, and the employment offices are terrible. I don't believe in the employment offices, because they just don't have their things right, I don't know what kind of system they have in there, but it's not good. That was the end of that. Some people they hire are from employment offices and some other means.

KM: Speaking of, well that injury is separate from the one I'm going to ask you but, in all you years of working at GM were you yourself ever injured?

JS: No, I think their safety thing is pretty good, a few people have gotten hurt out there, and a lot of people claim they got hurt and they didn't. They want to get out of work, and they claimed to receive an injury there and they really got it somewhere else, things like that. I had a few little injuries that were nothing serious. And they have a hospital to take care of it there.

KM: Did you see any major injuries of other people or accidents?

JS: This one time a guy got killed, it was just like starting time it was like four o'clock in the afternoon, and the line started and he bent over to do his job and a piece of metal fell off, and it was an accident, one of those things. It wasn't because of negligence or anything, it was something that just happened.

KM: A machine broke?

JS: A piece of heavy metal broke on a conveyer chain, and it broke and fell on top of him and killed him. But that doesn't happen very often, maybe the last time in the plant, oh in three plants, maybe three guys have been killed. I don't know it might be more than that, not many, because safety is pretty good. You're supposed to wear goggles all the time, but people don't use them all time, because they don't like to wear the glasses.

KM: Is that for on the line safety?

JS: Yeah, and it's enforced.

KM: Safety?

JS: Oh yeah, if you go in the body shop your not supposed to enter because of the sparks, and of you have to you have to wear goggles, you have to have them on. There is all these little safety areas. Safety.

KM: It's always been enforced?

JS: Yes. Then you have O.S.H.A., they come in and check things out.

KM: Oh regular inspections?

JS: Yes, if there is people not wearing glasses in the area, you can take your glasses off if you walk in to the cafeteria or maybe if you walk in the aisle way out of the production area, but if OSHA came in there and saw a person working the job with no glasses on they would fine General Motors. It's not GM's fault it's that guys fault. Some people don't like to where them, they get tired of wearing them. Some people when they paint don't wear their masks, and that's their own fault.

KM: So there is various safety equipment?

JS: Yeah, there is safety equipment for everything because, things happen sometimes. It can't be controlled, most of the time I was there, ninety percent ninety-nine percent, it's pretty well under control.

KM: When you retired you were in a management position or?

JS: No I was never in management, I never wanted to go into management, I worked in the office, I did paper work, and it was good that way. I like it like that, it was like helping the plant, and doing things that were important, but never management.

KM: Was that a daytime position?

JS: Yeah, that was mostly days, there was a few guys that did it on second shift.

KM: Did you feel that suggestions were well considered or?

JS: Suggestions?

KM: Employee suggestions?

JS: I think so, a lot of people got rewarded. A couple friends of mine made a lot of money from suggestions.

KM: Oh they reward?

JS: Twenty thousand dollars for good suggestions. At that time I don't know what it is now.

KM: Was it like that from the beginning or was that a program?

JS: That was a program that was instituted probably I would say twenty some years ago maybe longer. It was small at the beginning, a suggestion you would get a thousand dollars and a turkey or something. And suggestions get better and better, and a lot of guys have a lot of ideas. There's a lot of people out there that have very good ideas, even though a lot of people didn't have a formal education. But they were very wise, knowing what it takes to put things together and solving problems.

KM: What if anything would you like to add to the interview that maybe we haven't covered? Do you want to tell me anything about any experiences or?

JS: Well the only thing I remember is when the women started coming to the plant. They came in, got jobs, started working, and we met some of the girls. We had a good time. We were all young people.

KM: More socializing when you were young?

JS: Yeah more socializing, it wasn't a party, just socializing, before it was all guys, now you could talk to the girls too. It made the hours go better. So it was good.

KM: Do you think women entering the work force changed anything in society or the way anything was in the plant maybe?

JS: I don't think it changed anything. The women just came in and they did the same thing they would do outside. Some met men in there and they got married, and they have happy families and are successful. I know some personal friends of mine that met and got married. It was just like anything else, that women came in and started working. I don't think anything has changed. Of course, women moved into the work force so it's going to push some guys out of the work force too. Even now

that's how it is. There is a lot of women in high jobs at the plant.

KM: That came out through the line or?

JS: I would say a lot came through the line and moved up, which is cool, they made that extra effort.

KM: College or classes the company provided?

JS: College, GM does help you pay for your education. You have to pull a certain average, but they do pay. I know one girl, and she is a general supervisor because, she went to school. A lot of girls have top jobs, a lot in supervision and in the offices and guys too. There is a pretty even mix I would say.

KM: Do you feel it's better for you supervisor to come from the line, than maybe somebody who came right into management?

JS: Well most of the people now that they use from the line, before they picked them off the line. There has been people who have worked on the line who have become plant superintendents. I don't know what education they had, but they knew how the car was built. I think they might have had one or two in the past. But most of the people that are in high supervision are come from GM schools. Catholic schools, and people who study hard. You can move up, and like anything else you have to know what you are doing, you can't get moved up if you don't.

KM: Very true. Anything else we haven't covered?

JS: I think we, there might be a few things, do you have any questions?

KM: I want you to say whatever you feel that it was positive and you feel like it improved your family life.

JS: Definitely it was a positive thing for the whole Valley here. I think a lot of the places have opened up and closed down and opened up two years later, are still there, so something is going good. They're selling those cars and they are built pretty good. The quality is good, driving quality, I mean even from day one quality, quality, quality. Build it right the first time so you don't have to rebuild it again.

KM: Would you like to add any comment about your fellow workers, do you think any unfavorable like over the years has been cast on them? Do you have anything you would like people to know?

JS: I think overall the work force is good people. There is no problems with the workers, everyone got along good. Sometimes maybe there were a couple little problems, but working in there everyday, I didn't say anything that serious bad going on. No fighting, no big arguments, nothing.

KM: And again everything was positive from the union side?

JS: The union was positive. We had meetings every month, what they did, would guide us to be organized. We had our own building and we have picnics over there, they do a lot of activities, they help a lot of people in the Valley. The drives for food for the poor people, they held drives every year to collect toys for the children. People do a lot of extra things out there, and sometimes people don't even recognize that. This is a big plant, they bring baskets and fill them up with food. Big baskets, and they collect money for other organizations, they help other unions. Our union has been pretty good. They bought a property in Michigan called Black Lake, and they have buildings over there. They send people for education over there for how the union runs, and you can take your family with you for a week or two. You have to do things, you're not going to get things out if you don't know what your doing, or if you don't attempt to find out. Go for a week up there and they pay for it and take some classes. That's what they want. Overall the union has been good. They have to work together to keep the place going. That's what they strive for.

KM: So currently right now, you still run your music business and it's located in Salem.

JS: Broadway Music, you want to buy a piano I will sell you one. We have a school there too.

KM: Oh wonderful. So there is nothing more you would like to say?

JS: I think that's everything. If you have any other questions later on you can call me up. Maybe I repeated myself, so you'll have to go through there and see what's good.

KM: Thank you for giving me your time, and this opportunity to talk to you today, and spending the afternoon with me.

JS: No problem it was good.