

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
GM Lordstown

Personal Experiences
O.H. 2053

Robert Ozenghar
Interviewed
By
Michael Murphy
On
November 8, 2001

ARCHIVE
Oral
History
2053

Youngstown State University

Oral History Program

GM Lordstown

O.H. #2053

Interviewee: BOB OZENGHAR

Interviewer: Michael Murphy

Subject: GM Lordstown

Date: November 18, 2001

This project is being funded by the Ford Foundation and the Center for Working Class Studies.

MM: This is Michael Murphy doing an interview for the Youngstown State Oral History Program and the Center for Working Class Studies; this project is funded by the Ford Foundation. Today is November 18, 2001 and the time is five pm. I am here today with Mr. Robert Ozenghar and I would like to thank Mr. Ozenghar for being interviewed today. One of the first questions we'd like to get into Bob is we want to find out about your family background. What I'd like to know first is where are your parents from?

BO: My father was born here in Ohio down by Salem, Ohio. My mother was born on Buffalo Road, I am not sure if that's Green Township or what.

MM: Green Township, this area?

BO: Yeah, all from this area.

MM: Okay and the same with your grandparents were from this area as well?

BO: I am not exactly sure where her parents came from, they were coalminers they could have come from Pennsylvania or West Virginia.

MM: Okay. And your father's parents?

BO: My great-great-great-grandfather came from Holland and moved into Ohio. So, they are Ohio born.

MM: Okay so when they immigrated they came straight to Ohio that you know of.

BO: That I know of.

MM: Okay. And what type of work did your father do?

BO: At various times he worked for Goshen Township and Perry Township down by Salem, Ohio. He worked at the Pittsburgh foundry down in Salem, Ohio until he retired.

MM: And what years were those when he worked for the foundry?

BO: Those were approximately early 60's until 68.

MM: And your mother did she work at all?

BO: No she was just a housewife.

MM: Housewife that important work as it is. And do you have any siblings?

BO: I've got a brother Sam he works at Lordstown, Ohio. I've got a sister Sarah Carson she works at a nursing home down in Colombian I believe.

MM: So, just the three of you?

BO: And I've got a half brother, my mother's child that lives in Salem, Ohio who is retired.

MM: Where did you attend school?

BO: West Branch, originally it was Gosain Union School District, but then they changed it to West Branch.

MM: About what year did you graduate?

BO: In '65.

MM: '65 and what was school like for you?

BO: Well, it wasn't really an enjoyable experience, because we were the poor people in the district and I felt that I was tormented on account of that.

MM: West Branch is a rural school district?

BO: Rural, yes.

MM: But you have your farm families.

BO: Yes there are farm families and it was all rural area.

MM: Of ethnic background you mentioned that your one grandfather is from Holland do have any idea where some of the other heritage might come from on your mother's side?

BO: From Ireland, the last name was McClish.

MM: Okay, what of the neighborhood that you grew up in, I know being rural that its not quiet a small neighborhood, but what kind of memories do you have of growing up in your neighborhood or your neighbors, or the kids that lived around you?

BO: The neighborhood that I grew up in was North Salem. Farm country mainly, I grew up poor, there were times that if people wouldn't have brought us any food we wouldn't have anything to eat. Basically everybody knew everybody.

MM: Was there a big distance between homes since it was out there?

BO: Compared to now yes. Where I lived there was probably a quarter of a mile from anybody else on each side of me.

MM: So, its way different from growing up in an urban setting where you have people on top of each other.

BO: Oh defiantly.

MM: When did you first get married?

BO: I married my first wife in 1968. November 24, 1968. We have two children Robert the second he is in the Navy in Norfolk, and I got a daughter Amy she lives with me. She works at the Korner Restaurant as a waitress and goes to YSU she's a sophomore.

MM: Do you have any grandkids yet?

BO: I've got two grandchildren from my son. Briana she's five years old and Alexis will be a year old November 24. They are in Chesapeake Virginia.

MM: Not too far from the port. Where do you live now?

BO: I live at 3865 South Duck Creek Rd, North Jackson, Ohio.

MM: Okay and how long have you been out here?

BO: I've been here since July of '98.

MM: Okay. Where you living in Salem before that?

BO: No, I was raised North of Salem my first home was on Duck Creek Road after I got married. Then I moved to Deerfield, Ohio in 1970 bought a home there. I was there until '78 and then I bought another home on Rout 534 South of Berlin Center. I was there until '89. Then I bought a farm a twenty-seven and a half acre farm on Western Reserve Road, North Benton address, I was there until '98 and then I moved to my present address.

MM: Okay and what are your earlier work experiences prior to GM if any?

BO: When I graduated from high school my first job was working at a green house down by Salem, Ohio.

MM: Is it still there?

BO: No.

MM: No, okay.

BO: I worked at another green house and quit there and I did farm work the rest of the summer and then I got a job at the pottery. I worked at a couple of different potteries. I went to Mullins Manufacturing in Salem.

MM: About what year was that?

BO: That was early 1966.

MM: Okay really you graduated in?

BO: In '65.

MM: So, you bounced around the small jobs, but then you got a manufacturing job.

BO: Then I went to the army in October of '66. I went back to Mullins manufacturing for a short period of time, after spending two years in the army. And I worked at American Fire Clay at Canfield, which is no longer there. Took a job at Denman Tire in Warren. I was there for a couple years. Took a sales job and worked it for six months and then I ended up at General Motors in May of '73.

MM: May of '73. In your service did you go to Vietnam, were you out of the country at all?

BO: No, I was stationed at Fort Meade, Maryland I was a cook.

MM: Okay. Next we'll cover your work experience at GM. You said that you started there in 1973. Is that your seniority date?

BO: May 30, 1973.

MM: Okay. Everybody seems to have their seniority date. What department did you start in?

BO: I started working in the body shop. The first day on the job I was putting tailgates on station wagons.

MM: Have you worked in other areas after the body shop?

BO: I've worked in the paint department over in the Van Plant when it was there. I worked in the trim department as an inspector. Then I came back to the Car Plant, I went to the motor line, I worked there for a while. Took another job on Toveyor, worked there for a while. Worked chasie for a while, worked as a monitor, and then I was back in the trim department.

MM: You're in the trim department now?

BO: Yes.

MM: Okay, can you describe a workday at GM, a current workday or a past work day that you'd like to talk about?

BO: My workday starts at seven o'clock in the morning; the line is running when I get there with the end of third shift. We have to be there to relieve the man that is on the job. We have a sixteen-minute break at nine thirty. We have a lunch break from twelve to twelve twenty-four. For our eight hours it would be two thirty six, we get the last twenty-four minutes as break time. A lot of times we'll work over our eight hours though.

MM: And what exactly are you doing while you are in the trim shop?

BO: The operation that I am on no consist of torquing the striker bolts down, putting two plugs in the door post, where the striker fixture, mounts, and there are rubber bumpers on each door I have to take off and throw them in baskets. Time, after time, after time.

MM: And how long have you been doing that in particular?

BO: I've been on that job for approximately three months.

MM: Did you ever have to swing shifts?

BO: I've worked various shifts depending on my seniority on where I am. I prefer daylight, but I've been bumped to second shift, and I worked on third shift. I've worked all three shifts.

MM: And how did that affect your family life when this occurred?

BO: On second shift you don't have no family life when your kids are at school. On third shift basically you try to sleep during the day, which I couldn't sleep very well. In my opinion the daylight shift is the normal work shift.

MM: It's easier to get along with your family and to coordinate like a family.

BO: Right.

MM: When you work a day turn job. If you could describe your job in one word what would it be and why?

BO: Boring for the simple fact that it's all repetition. my job takes approximately 45 seconds on the four door to do and 28 seconds on the two door, you don't have much time and unless the line stops I don't get any break.

MM: So, it's putting one screw after another.

BO: It's one after another.

MM: How have working conditions changed over time for you? I know you said you went to monitor, but how were working conditions for the line itself.

BO: Well, I worked on the line as a monitor.

MM: Okay.

BO: All the jobs that are on the line are just repetitious over a period of time there is more worked added to the job, they expect more work out of each individual. If something is right they find a way to make it wrong. It is typical if somebody is happy on the job they are going to find a way to make it wrong. Delegate them a job that might divide the work between three of four different people. So, they can eliminate more employees.

MM: So, the technologies for example would affect.

BO: Right technologies effected in the body shops when they put the robots in, that eliminated a lot of people. They are getting more and more automated all the time. They want to run with less and less people all the time.

MM: I thought that they would realize that that's not really possible. They have to have hands on; robots can't do all the work.

BO: Robot can't correct itself where a human being can.

MM: So, some of the technologies, did any of them make your job easier?

BO: Not my job in particular this time.

MM: Any of them make it harder for you?

BO: Not the job I am on.

MM: Some of the technologies made it harder for people to keep up.

BO: There's people that lost jobs on the count of technology.

MM: Do you socialize with people you work with inside the plant as well as outside of the plant?

BO: Not really.

MM: Do you participate in any company sponsored activities or union activities?

BO: I used to go to union meetings; I haven't done that for years. I don't really participate with people outside the plant.

MM: Okay. If your not participate then what kind of things do you do for leisure after work? Like you see a lot of people from GM if they didn't do things they would go to Bill's Place afterwards.

BO: There are a lot of people that go out and they golf after work and a lot of people go to the bars after work.

MM: But you don't particularly go with them?

BO: I don't follow that crowd.

MM: For your leisure time you would do?

BO: For my leisure time I spend most of my time with my family.

MM: How do you really feel about working for GM?

BO: I make a good living off of General Motors and I am very thankful for my job. I consider myself blessed to have a good job and good benefits.

MM: And what role has the union played in your life?

BO: At times if it wasn't for the union management would have fired me. A lot of times managements was wrong, but the union to me is a necessity for the workingman. You have good benefits and we make a good living and if it wasn't for the union we wouldn't.

MM: So, my next question was do you attend union activities, but you said you really don't go to meetings. They have dances and Christmas parties what about that?

BO: No, I don't attend those either.

MM: You stated that you found the union necessary to help you up there. What other things that reoccur that you see in the newspapers that they'll talk about, you always get an outside opinion when they want to analyze things about the union in the valley and how they react. The plant has a history of militant unionism; especially in the 70's can you comment on that?

BO: I never saw it. I was hired in '73, and I never saw a lot of militant activities. I know that when there are problems out there people will stick together, they will back union decisions. There are a lot of things that go on with in the union that I don't approve of, but the union is a necessity.

MM: Right, but militant is not how you would address it, but you think it's a necessity that they stick together as strongly as they do.

BO: Defiantly.

MM: Why do you think it was, do you think it was the time era or the nature of the management at the time in the 70's?

BO: I think the nature of the management has changed a lot. I feel that over the years they used to say they had a revolving door up there in the 60's when people hired in and some of the jobs the why I was told the way they were I can understand why they had a revolving door. But I think that like I said before our union was a necessity and I wouldn't have had a job out there if it wasn't for them. I was to labor and management wanted to fire me.

MM: Okay. Can you comment on any of the strikes that occurred out there? There was on '72 and you came in after that.

BO: I came in May 10th of '73 and they were down for two weeks, there was some kind of labor problem, but I can't recall what that problem was. We really haven't had any strikes out there that I can recall since '73. I haven't lost any time off other then other plants having problems we were shut down for a period of time.

MM: How do you feel about that, was it Dayton?

BO: Dayton was down.

MM: It caused everybody else to go down.

BO: I feel if they didn't stick up for their rights we would have been next.

MM: It seems that a lot of people transferred into Lordstown because of down sizing or other plant closing. How were these transfers received by others?

BO: Personally myself I received them like any other employee. I never really saw any problems with them bring in these people in; because they weren't given their original seniority date was I think like January 1985. So, they couldn't bid in on jobs that older people were entitled to.

MM: So, their seniority never affected your bidding rights?

BO: Not my bidding rights no.

MM: Did these people seem to fit in with the mindset of the unionism that is here in the valley?

BO: From what I can see they fit in well.

MM: There was a lot of writing about the Vega and you worked on the Vega while you were there. What do you think went wrong?

BO: Bad material, bad engineering, quantity was more important then quality in that period of time. Basically over all it was just a poor design.

MM: At that time the management was more likely to put it on the union workers and blame the workers for the problem. Do you feel the workers were blamed too much for the problem?

BO: Management always blames it on the workingman they don't take no credit if it's good or if it's bad, especially if it's bad.

MM: Did they recognize any of the input that you might have had? You say hey I am putting this door on and no matter how I try every time I am dinging it. Do you see a repetitious flaw that you might have tried to call to somebody's attention, but never?

BO: Management listens to the worker much more today, there's a better relationship now. Over the years it just used to be send it down the line they will catch it.

MM: So, that's probably from the problem that came out with the Vega?

BO: Right.

MM: Poor engineering flaw.

BO: Our quality has improved immensely over the years.

MM: There's more with the competition had globally over the years its been forced.

BO: Right.

MM: So actually competition is what corrected it.

BO: Necessity corrected it.

MM: The steel mill has a reputation for gambling taking place at work. Do you find any thing like that common in the Lordstown Plant?

BO: General Motors is just like the city to me. You have all the potential for the crime that you have in Youngstown, Ohio or any place else, where you have a working force that large.

MM: So, it's a micro cause of life gambling, drinking on the job have there been problems with that that you have see that are over looked?

BO: I've seen drinking on the job on my time out there by both management and autoworkers.

MM: It's a don't ask don't tell policy? I get that feeling for?

BO: Basically anymore you don't want to get caught drinking on the job, because it is against shop rule and you can get fired.

MM: So, you see that it might be changing it might have been worse that one time.

BO: Like I said its like a small city. People get a way with what they can get a way with.

MM: Okay. To wrap this up what do you feel proudest about the work that you have done out at GM?

BO: I feel that I've had a good paying job and I try to do the best that I can. General Motor's plant and my job there, I would have been bankrupt a couple different times in my life because of medical bills, if I didn't have the benefits. I am very thankful of my job. As far as being proud I don't know if you can be, I guess I can say that I am proud that I am a survivor of General Motors.

MM: You're proud in a sense that you've done your work.

BO: My motto is fairs days work for a fair days pay.

MM: Would you want your son or daughter working at Lordstown?

BO: Personally I don't think its any kind of a life for anybody to be tied to something for eight hours a day, but as far as making a living it's a good place to work. The women out there and the men out there they do basically the same type of work. Whether my kid's work out there that would be up to them.

MM: They haven't asked yet?

BO: My daughter works summer help out there and she liked it.

MM: She did, it was an enjoyable experience for her?

BO: Yeah.

MM: What job did they put her on do you know?

BO: She was working in the chassis department, with their summer help out there you work various jobs whoever is on vacation or whoever is sick.

MM: Is that through YSU is that something that we can sign up for?

BO: I helped her get in there basically.

MM: Is there anything in this interview that we have not covered that you would like to discuss or make a point about your work experience at GM?

BO: Basically my work experience has been a good experience and General Motors gave me a good living and I wouldn't have today what I have if it hadn't been for General Motors and I am very thankful for my job. Havana, Florida is where I'll be retiring to. I returned to Havana, Florida on February 1, 2003.

MM: You will be retiring next year? And how much time will you have in then?

BO: I'll put the thirty years in.

MM: Thirty years.

BO: They base your retirement on the hours you work the first year and the hours you worked the last year. You have to put in so many hours per year. So, if you get your hours in earlier then your thirty years you can retire on thirty years seniority.

MM: Your looking forward to retirement?

BO: One hundred percent!

MM: Will you end up looking for any other little work you don't seem to be?

BO: My wife and I bought a home in Havana. I am going to do some fishing and I am going to enjoy life, and if I get bored I'll go find a job.

MM: Your still relatively young enough you could still find work.

BO: I'll be fifty-six years old when I retire. I'll be able to live good on what my benefits are when I retire.

MM: Great, thank you again for you're time and giving this opportunity to talk to you and I appreciate you sharing your personal experiences with us.

BO: I enjoyed this very much Michael.

MM: Great, thank you.