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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Lordstown GM Project

Personal Experiences

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Charles Rhodes

Interviewed By

Vincent Shivers

On

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Interviewee: Charles Rhodes

Interviewer: Vincent Shivers

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This is an interview with Charles Rhodes for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Lordstown GM Project, by Vincent Shivers, on February 21, 2004, at the home of Mr. Rhodes. This project was funded by the Ford Foundation.

S: First to start off, for the tape just say your name.

R: My name is Charles Rhodes. I've been a resident of Youngstown just about all of my life. I'm happily retired from General Motors, the fabricating plant.

S: Were you born here in Youngstown?

R: No. I was born in Georgia, but I came here as a child six months old to Trumbull County in Girard.

S: Where did you go to high school or elementary school?

R: I started the first and second grade in Girard at Maple. I moved from Girard to Youngstown and finished my elementary school at Jefferson. I went to Hayes and went to Rayen. I graduated from Rayen.

S: You did the same route I went.

R: Is that right?

S: Yes. [Laughter]. That's my roots.

R: Is that right?

S: Yes, Jefferson, Rayen. Yes, it's still standing over there.

R: Yes.

S: Are you the only one in your family that worked at General Motors?

R: No, my brother, he worked there. My son is working there currently.

S: How did you end up at General Motors?

R: Well, I ended up there because I had a suspicion that the steel mill, the steel industry, was going to bottom out in Youngstown. That kind of encouraged me to go.

S: About what year was that?

R: When I first went to General Motors it was in 1966. That's when they first built the assembly plant.

S: So you were at the steel mill for how long?

R: I was there for about twelve years.

S: Twelve years?

R: Yes.

S: Oh, yes? So you decided to leave the steel mill?

R: Yes.

S: That was in 1966?

R: Yes.

S: And you didn't think the steel mills would be around?

R: I didn't think that they were going to be around too much longer. In addition, I worked at Youngstown Sheet and Tube in Brier Hill. I just didn't see them putting any

money into the plant. They weren't fixing anything, and it just kind of indicated to me that they might be going down and letting that mill go anyhow.

S: Do you think that was kind of a rare thought then?

R: Yes, I believe it was. As I've gotten older and I look back over the whole situation, I honestly believe God was kind of sending me a message. I really do.

S: Because it seems like the writing wasn't really on the wall for the steel mills until the 1970s, right? At least the late 1970s.

R: Exactly. Of course, there were other factors that led up to that. I would get laid off from my department, which was in the blast furnace. Then they would send me to Campbell to work in the labor gang. I just didn't see any room for advancement. As a matter of fact, it was very prejudiced, highly prejudiced. I recognized that right off. I just figured that something was better ahead than this.

S: So when you first got out there to General Motors, how long was it before you realized that you'd made a good decision?

R: Well, it probably wasn't until about 1969. What happened was I did not quit Sheet and Tube. I worked my vacation. I got hired at General Motors. I took a vacation, and I went there, and I worked. At the end of that vacation, things were so crazy at General Motors that I quit after having only been there a week I believe it was. I went back to the mill. After that they built the fabricating plant. I got more disgusted with the mill the second time than I was the first time. I went back to General Motors. This time I stayed, and I was working at the fabricating plant. We did not have a union at the time because they had just built the plant. They had to get certified, had to petition to the National Labor Board to get certified. That took work. I stayed that time, and when the mill

called me back I refused to go back. I had burnt the bridge, so I just stayed there. I saw a lot of hard times, but having been in the mill and having seen the prejudices that existed there, no room for advancement, and all those types of things, I just said that I was going to do what I could to make sure that that didn't happen at the fabricating plant. I started working with the International Union from Region Two up in Cleveland. They were the reps that came into the plant. They didn't come into the plant, but we had caucus meetings outside of the plant to decide our strategy to get the UAW as the bargaining agent in the plant.

S: So when you first went there you said it was kind of crazy out at General Motors at first? When you first got out there you said it was a little the first time around?

R: Yes. Well, that was only a week that I stayed at the fabricating plant.

S: The first week, okay.

R: I was afraid. Not the fabricating plant but the assembly plant. I was afraid of getting fired because keep in mind I had about twelve years with Sheet and Tube. I was established, had a family, a son in school. People were so afraid that they were doing very unsafe things, and acting crazy, and hurting themselves. The supervision was afraid. The workers were afraid. It was just mass confusion. I was afraid that I would have gotten terminated as I'd seen other guys getting terminated left and right for no fault of their own. I just didn't want to run that risk, so I quit. When I came back and got hired in the fabricating plant, it wasn't nearly as hyper as the assembly plant. I saw where I could probably make something out of it, and so I stayed.

S: When you were at the assembly plant how many cars were they making an hour when you first got there?

R: They were making sixty full sized cars an hour, sixty full sized Chevrolets.

S: And how many were there when you left, when you retired? Was it about the same?

R: Well, keep in mind I left the assembly plant and went to the fabricating plant, and that mode of operations is entirely different. We didn't make cars; we made pieces.

S: Right. Okay, and you thought that would go better?

R: Oh, yes. Plus I'm on the ground floor. I had the opportunity to do and to be a lot of things.

S: Now you said you played a role in helping the UAW come into the plant?

R: Oh, yes.

S: What was that like?

R: Well, keep in mind that when you're trying to petition for a union, you cannot meet or do anything in the plant. We met at restaurants and hotels and back rooms and all those types of things to develop a strategy and to be taught some things about organizing and what to expect. We did that. We worked with the organizers from Region Two that was in Cleveland at the time. They sent representatives from there to help us organize an effort. We did the things that we had to do. We got enough people to sign that they wanted a union, to petition management for a union. We got those petitions. We turned them in. By law they had to recognize those petitions, and they had to meet with the National Labor Relations Board. The National Labor Relations Board, according to the law they had to have a public vote in the plant as to if the people wanted to accept or reject the union. It passed overwhelmingly.

S: Oh, wow. Oh, yes?

R: Oh, yes. About eighty something, probably about ninety something percent.

S: Wow. What do you think played a role in the union going over so fast?

R: I think that there were several factors. You have to understand that the fabricating plant is basically populated with . . . I would say fifty percent of the work force is skilled trades people. So then you just don't get that type of skilled trades people just from Ohio. You have to go nationwide. We even went overseas and got a lot of people from overseas. They met the criteria. In going across the nation and getting the skilled trades people that were needed to get the plant running and maintain it and everything, it also brought a lot of opinions. They were from other UAW plants by and large. Everybody that came there, they kind of figured that they should bring their own local agreement in. The way things ran in their plant, it should run this way in that plant. That was impossible. That was a big hiccup. The other one was that some people had never worked in a plant at all, in a manufacturing plant at all. They were young, eighteen and nineteen year old guys. This may have been many of them's first employment. They just didn't understand the work life. They had to be taught. You had to be patient with them. That was a big factor that I would say kind of made it at the beginning. That's just a growing process.

S: So once the union was in there, how was management's reaction towards you guys?

R: Oh, they hated it. [Laughter]. They hated it. They tried to do everything that they could legally to hinder us. You know they had to give representation. The union representation is based upon the population, the numbers in the plant. For instance, if you have two thousand people working at the plant, then you're entitled to X amount of union people. It's spelled out in the contract, in the national contract, as to the office space that they would be given, the hours that they should function. Their job would be

to do what union people do. Management had no right to interfere with them. They didn't want to buy that, and I was appointed by the International Union. There was about seven or eight of us. I was among that seven or eight as a committeeman, as a shop committeeman. They tried to interfere with me. They tried to monitor my committee calls that the plant was getting, was sending out. They tried to make me go to work on a job, a regular job that they really didn't have the right to do. They had a member of labor relations follow me through the plant. They didn't want to pay me. They wouldn't give me my time card because they said that I didn't work, and wasn't getting paid, and all kinds of stuff.

S: There's always animosity when unions form, but do you think they were thinking that they were paying you to do something that wasn't related to the job? Was that kind of the attitude that they had?

R: Well, yes. They knew by agreement because they had been running plants for years and years and years that have a union. They knew that this one was supposed to operate primarily in the same way with some variations that were spelt out in the local contract. By and large they knew what they were supposed to do. They just didn't want to do it because they felt that they were management, and they were paying the people to make parts. They did not like to be told that they had to adhere to what a contract said. Basically that was the problem.

S: So really it wasn't anything foreign to General Motors because General Motors didn't have any plants that there weren't any unions at?

R: Exactly. That's right.

S: So it's more or less that they were going to see what they were going to get away with?

R: Exactly, and that's what they've always done, starting out.

S: At what point do you think management kind of accepted the fact that you guys were there, that you guys were going to be part of the union?

R: General Motors was just like any other organization, or plant, or business. They have a boss. They were the people; the local management were the people that ran the plant at Lordstown. They had some people in Detroit that were over them, and because local management didn't want to cooperate and didn't want to even try to make things work, it prompted several illegal strikes called Wildcat Strikes. It prompted several of those. Then when that happened, the people from Detroit came down to Lordstown. The UAW, we were able to prove to them management's shortcomings and things that they were doing that kind of propagated those strikes. I'm not trying to justify them. It was wrong on both parts, but the thing of it is that they were trying to make it look like it was all the union. Anyway, after that they sent down a staff of people to investigate everything and look at what was going on, to look at the grievances that had been written, and did the grievance have any merit, was there any truth to them, and the health and safety problems in the plant. The attitudes of some of the staff people were so negative until when they found many of those things to be true. Then local management started backing up and started to live up to the language that was in the contract.

S: Right. So it was beneficial for them?

R: Oh, yes.

S: Detroit was saying, "Well, what's going on here?"

R: Yes.

S: Yes, because that's always an issue when you talk about General Motors. Many times you hear people mention that there was the strike here, the strike here. People on the outside, the media, don't always get the whole story. They get part of the story, and then it's made to seem like it's the union. It's the union. The union guys, they want more. They want more. They already have enough.

R: Yes.

S: Yes, and that's always like a perception that given, but like you were saying, there's two sides to the story. When they came down they realized what was going on.

R: Yes, they did. Just let me add this. You need to understand that when a plant has accepted a bargaining agent, in our case UAW, you just don't go in with a contract. First of all, you don't have a local contract because you've just become organized. You have to negotiate one. In the contract that you are currently placed under, everything in the contract book is not applicable to this plant because that contract was written a couple of year ago.

S: Right.

R: You can only use two-thirds of the national agreement that would be applicable to our plant. Management again, even after all of this mess they still tried to take advantage of us. What they did is they hired. Management had a right to hire with no constrictions, no criteria, anything because it's their plant, prior to the union. After that union comes, then there are some rules that they have to follow particularly when it comes down to skilled trades. What they did is they hired everybody that they wanted to, mostly white guys right into skilled trades. They didn't have journeymen cards. Many of them were people

that were grocery clerks, and maintenance people, and you name it. They came in and they hired them because they knew that those jobs were going to be the top moneymakers, and they hired them. They hired white guys exclusively first. That was when we only had two-thirds of the national agreement. So then after the union came in they started hiring black people and putting them in skilled trades. When they did this, the UAW workers that were in the plant, the journeymen that do the jobs, it was their job to train the people that they were hiring. They said, "No." They put in about ten black guys at one time. Prior to that they only had one. So when they put the ten black guys in the other white UAW members would not teach them many things. Then the union had to take the position that it was a violation of the agreement, the way they put them in, which it was. Keep in mind that they had the right to put them in there, and nothing would have been said. They knew exactly what they were doing. It was those types of issues that we had to constantly fight the whole time I was out there.

S: Wow. So that's one of the important roles of the union, to look over, oversee these problems. That's pretty interesting.

R: Yes. The UAW is about equality, but I can tell you that even in the United States the laws that we have that govern this land, they were written and part of the law, but they could take those laws out of context to use them against you when they wanted to get a point across or have it their way. Not only General Motors but also Ford, Chrysler, and the rest of them are the same way. How often do you pick up papers and read where they were sued, and they were found guilty of racial discrimination in the workplace because of their hiring practices and stuff?

S: Right.

R: You see, so they know what to do. They just try to circumvent the process to have it their own way.

S: Right, because it almost seems like the more and more you read into law, in the future it will be almost impossible to sue for racial discrimination.

R: Right.

S: Or sexual discrimination.

R: Exactly.

S: Yes, and it seems like that's where unions actually need to start looking at that. Once again it's kind of hard putting that in the contract.

R: Yes, it is.

S: What is your quota, your goals. So what is your opinion of some of the strikes when they were occurring?

R: I guess when they were occurring they were not legal. The Wildcat strikes were not, but they were very much needed. I think that it almost had to happen to get the attention of the people in Detroit so that they could know first hand what's going on. Anytime you stop production, they aren't making any money. You've got their attention. I guarantee that you've got their attention.

S: Right, because you guys shut down other plants.

R: Absolutely.

S: Because there's also this perception that I kind of wonder about too that people say, "Well, the people in Youngstown try to have it like we're this big union town. We're the tough guys who go out there to the plant. We are the steel mill, the whatever plant, and we're going to show management." I think sometimes that's a bad perception.

R: Yes.

S: Because it's not dealing with the real reality of what's going on at General Motors and what's maybe going on at Packard or whatever. There's a problem at the plant. I think it's not that people in Youngstown are just rowdy and that they're part of a union.

R: Well, you know it's just like anything else. You have people that try to exploit things for their own selfish reasons and stuff like that. The UAW really has its people with those minds and methods, but let me say this. A good union officer in the UAW organization, they try and teach the people that you have a job to perform. You have a way that you need to perform it. It's wrong to try to uphold a person, an employee, just because he's a member of the union when he is in violation of the agreement himself. I know when I was a committeeman I would always try to tell that person that you are responsible for doing certain things. If nobody is violating your right, you certainly shouldn't be violating anybody else's rights. You need to do what you're getting paid to do. That's come out here, perform your job, mind your business, leave the plant in a decent orderly manner, and come back the same way the next day. Then if they're causing problems or something a good union official will let them know that and get it corrected so that you don't have to be following after the same guy telling him the same thing over and over and over.

S: How many years did you work as a committeeman?

R: Well, my whole tenure as a committeeman, I did that for about three years. Then after that my whole tenure out there was always union related. I was the jobs bank coordinator. I was the training coordinator for the UAW for just about my whole tenure there. It wasn't as a committeeman, but I worked for the union. It was a job that was

appointed to me by the international union. It was a lifetime appointment. That's what I did.

S: Okay. Did you like it?

R: Oh, yes. I really enjoyed it. It was a good job. It gave me an opportunity to work, and to help, and to relate things to people.

S: How do you feel about the QWL program?

R: The Quality of Work Life?

S: Yes.

R: I think that management finally got to see that having a partnership in what they're trying to do works much better than trying to have an adversarial attitude. What happened in the QWL then was it wasn't just union people. It was management, union people, and upper level management that came together, and talked out things, and brainstormed. They were proactive rather than trying to be reactive.

S: Okay. Do you think between when you first got out there and when you left, were there any particular changes that you've seen?

R: Yes. Quite honestly one of the changes particularly over in the standard plant was that we negotiated rates. For instance, if a rate was a hundred pieces per hour for an eight-hour shift, that was forty-eight hundred pieces for your shift production for that day. If you make your rate requirements for the day by 1:00 and you don't get off until 3:30, that means you've got two and half hours for leisure, to do whatever you want with that time. That was bad news. It caused people to get in trouble. It caused gambling in the plant.

S: Really?

R: It caused all kinds of hiccups and all kinds of trouble. That was a negative as far as I'm concerned, and I've seen since I've left the plant that they got rid of those standards, those rates, because when you get rid of them then you have more control over what you're doing. It's just that you come out there to work eight-hours, and you work at a normal pace for a normal man. You do that for eight-hours with the exception of your lunch and your breaks. When you do that, then you work right up until the whistle. It's good news for everybody involved, the management and the men.

S: So it's like that idle time didn't work out?

R: Amen, and that's what it was. I know that's right because I saw it. [Laughter].

S: What about the cars when you first went out there from the very first cars that were coming off of line? What did you think about the cars there?

R: When they were making the Chevrolet, the Impala and all of that, they were really good cars for that time. Then they brought in the Vega. They were trying to compete seemingly with the upsurge of foreign competition. All they wanted to do was put a name and a product out. They didn't put any technology or quality into it. They weren't for real, and I didn't care much about that product. I wouldn't have bought one. Then when they changed that, when they got rid of the Vega and they started producing the Cavalier, in my opinion it was a world-class car that could compete with any car in its field. I've owned several of them, and right now we're looking to get another one.

S: Are you going to get a Cavalier, or are you going to get a Cobalt?

R: Well, I probably will get a Cavalier because the Cobalt is going to be out of my price range for what I want to use it for. [Laughter]. I don't want any car payments.

S: Have you seen the Cobalt?

R: Not in person.

S: Okay, I saw it. I was in Pittsburgh on Monday.

R: Oh, yes?

S: Yes, I saw the SS. I believe it was a two-door. Then there was the four-door. It was a nice looking car. I didn't think it was seeing pictures of it and everything. I didn't think it was.

R: It looked better in person.

S: It looked a lot better in person. I think it's a very nice looking car. The only thing that worries me also is just like what you said, the price. It seems like it will be a nice car to at least give the Honda and those types of cars a run for their money. It's a smooth car, and there's another generation of kids that might pick up on that Cobalt. You were out there also when they had the van out there.

R: Yes, I was there then. I didn't work in the van plant. We stamped parts for the van plant.

S: When you look at the plant today and you look at the size of the plant from when you first got out there, when you first got out there did you have an idea? Did you think that the plant would still be around today?

R: Well, yes. I thought that it would be, but I didn't think that—how can I put it—that it would be as it is now. From what I'm hearing most of the work is going to be done in the fabricating plant that was traditionally just stamping. Now they're going to move part of the assembly over there in the fabricating plant, which tells me it won't be really in the near future a fabricating plant. It will just be an assembly plant, and the fabricating plant will be a plant that just kind of puts together modulars for the total operation.

S: Okay, and would that get into the outsourcing?

R: Somewhat, yes. It probably will. You know that outsourcing, it's something to be concerned with. The way the prices of the automobiles are and the way the labor market is, it's almost a necessity that management must be given the flexibility to outsource.

S: Okay, yes. I kind of wonder when you hear about so many jobs going overseas. What does really Made in America really mean? It makes you wonder about that plant out there because it seems that that recent incident a few years ago with Al Ali and Herman Moss, everyone was thinking the plant was going, if we're going to get the new car out there and everything. What's going to be the longevity of that plant, the next ten years once that Cobalt's done? Have you ever thought about that?

R: I think that that plant is going to be there, but it's going to take the cooperation of the workers, our community, and management to keep that plant going and doing. I think it could stay, and I think it could be even greater than it's ever been.

S: Do you think at some point with union and with management that they would work on ever bringing like another product through there, not just the Cobalt, enlarging the plant? It seems like the paint plant out there is large, but it seems like there will be less people in the paint plant.

R: Yes, not just in the paint but the whole operation. Technology has grown and changed so much until I think that the plant that we see out there today, maybe in twenty-five or thirty years it will be outdated. They'll have to even come up with greater technology to keep pace with the rest of the market.

S: Do you think the union kind of prepared guys for that?

R: Yes. Unbeknown to a lot of people the union has really, and that kind of goes back to outsourcing. The international union knows that they cannot realistically stop outsourcing, period, totally. What they've done is they've shifted gears. They said, "Okay. We cannot stop outsourcing, but here's what we're going to do. We're going to offer buyouts. Instead of laying people off we're going to let attrition take care of it. Those people that retire or die or quit for whatever reason, we won't replace them. What we'll do is if any people are replaced because of outsourcing," and they've already done this by the way, "is that we've given them a lifetime job with General Motors. They may not work here, but we will not hire anybody at Oklahoma, California, New Jersey, Texas or wherever until those folks are working." You see, it's kind of a built-in protection because they knew what was coming on. That is good in that respect.

S: That's good. That's good to hear too.

R: Yes.

S: Let's see what else I have here. What was your day at work like, an average day?

R: Are you referring to my job in the union or building car parts?

S: Both actually.

R: When I worked in the plant I was an inspector. I worked in quality control. I only performed that job on premium time. Monday through Friday I did my union job. If I chose, if I was asked to work over on a Saturday or a Sunday, then I performed my inspector's job. I liked it. It gave me an opportunity to make sure . . . Part of my job was to make sure that the metal matched. We had to make different spaces, gaps. The tolerance could only be so much. If it wasn't meeting up to tolerance, then we had to let someone know that it wasn't running through the course. I liked that then.

S: Did you ever work on the line?

R: I worked on the line for a year over at the assembly plant and maybe for about six months over at the fabricating plant, and that was my experience.

S: Okay. As a committeeman, what were some of the things that you would do?

R: I just took care of some health and safety issues. I took care of complaints on the floor. If there was a complaint, we'd try to iron it out on the floor between the foreman, and myself, and the employee. If that couldn't work, then I'd have to write a grievance. After you write so many grievances then they have what they call the step and a half meeting, which is with upper management. That would happen every Tuesday, and we would try to resolve those grievances. If they were not resolved, then we went to what we called the second step. These things that I'm saying, that was a great part of my day. Then I tried to be proactive in that I'd walk around and talk to some of the guys. They wouldn't have to call me or anything. I'd just ask them how things were going, if they had any suggestions to make it run better, or this, that, and the other. If they were acting up, I'd have to tell them, "You've got to come to work. Transportation is no excuse. You knew where the plant was when you hired in here. It hasn't moved one iota." Oftentimes they would be trying to feel you out. If they see where you're coming from and know that you're not going to be going down there crying for them . . . It's your job, and you have to protect it. You come to work. I did a lot of that. Sometimes even the foreman would say, "Chuck, I think you need to talk to that guy." I'd go and try to talk to him friendly, not coercive, confrontational, or anything like that. I'd just try to talk to the guy, and the real world that we live in, get him to see it.

S: Yes, because it gets kind of hard when you're trying to intervene before it even becomes a problem.

R: Exactly, and if you lie to a guy you're not helping him, yourself, or anybody else.

S: Right, and it's easy to stand on the outside of the plant and say, "Why are people out here doing this? Why aren't people doing that? Why can't they just do this and that?" It's a different thing when you're out there eight or ten hours a day and you're dealing with different personalities and attitudes. It had to have been a tough job at the same time.

R: Sure, yes. Then even like in real life today most people are good people, but something may have happened at home. The employee might be having some kind of traumatic experience that you don't even know about. Maybe that's why he's acting difficult.

S: Right.

R: So you have to just go easy and just try to find out what's going on. I'm thankful to God that I had the opportunity because I think that I helped a lot of people.

S: When you retired it was early retirement, right?

R: Yes.

S: Did you decide that you were ready to put your time in or come out? [Laughter].

R: They made me an offer that I couldn't refuse. What happened was when I retired I only had twenty-four point three years of service with them. I knew that I was going to retire when I got to be sixty because I did not want to work thirty years. I would have been sixty-two. I didn't want to work that long. They made me an offer at fifty-five that was just about the same thing I would have gotten had I waited until sixty-two to retire.

The only difference is that they gave it to me seven years early. [Laughter]. I said, "I'll take it. I'll take it." That's what I did.

S: Do you feel good about that?

R: I loved it. I love it. I miss the guys and the camaraderie that many of us used to share. I had a good time at work, but I definitely didn't like going out there at 3:00 in the morning, at 4:00 and 5:00 and all like that.

S: What was your shift?

R: My normal shift was 7:00 to 3:30, but oftentimes if they started production they wanted to me to come in at 3:00. They would afford me the opportunity to come in at 3:00 also. Then that's what I would do. It was tough getting up that early, but it was good on Friday. I would go. The hardest part of it I thought after a few years was just getting up and getting out there to it.

S: When you first started out there at the plant did you guys see the pay scale as being low or average in that first time period? In the 1960s was that decent money then?

R: To tell you the truth about it many places at that time were paying more than General Motors was.

S: Oh, yes?

R: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact the job that I had in the mill was paying more than General Motors, and I took the pay cut to come there. Let's see. I think I was making . . . I can't even remember. It was ridiculously low. It was under three dollars an hour, but it was a livable wage even then. It just wasn't nearly like it is now. The benefits and everything, they were always good, but they weren't nearly what they are now.

S: Okay, yes. You guys went in there. That's kind of interesting to think about General Motors back then, the pay scale that you were getting. There were other jobs around here then too.

R: Yes, there were. Absolutely, all kinds of jobs.

S: Right, so General Motors was just another job to some people.

R: Right.

S: When the steel mills closed, how did that effect you guys out there?

R: It did not have a direct effect on the plant. Probably in this area it may have affected new car sales as far as the Cavalier was concerned, but I'm sure if it dropped on one end, it picked up on another end. What it did do I think was it made all of us realize to a degree how blessed we were to have a job.

S: Yes, because that was serious.

R: Oh, yes.

S: And you guys survived a lot. That plant out there has seen a lot, a lot of jobs come and go.

R: Yes.

S: Do you think that had a lot to do with you guys being an international company?

R: Yes, General Motors—I can't think of what I want to say—basically what they did, they started other things like this outfit that . . . I can't think of the name of it right now. It had to do with computers, and General Motors went that way. They built up this company, and they started diversifying and making money from many other sources. It helped everybody.

S: Okay. It's very interesting because a lot has changed around here.

R: Oh, yes.

S: Even though the plant is not the same size it was when you first went out there, but when you think of some of the other jobs that used to be around here—some of the plants, the homes, and everything else, Youngstown as a whole—a lot has changed. That plant is still out there.

R: Yes, it is.

S: I think that's a testimony to it.

R: Oh, yes. That's impressive.

S: Earlier you were talking about when you got out there the race, the blacks, the numbers. Was it really outnumbered when you guys first went out there? How many blacks were out there when you first got to the plant?

R: When I first hired out there both times, the ratio, I don't even know if it was even hitting ten percent. I think it was required by the federal government at that time, over at the assembly plant. In the fabricating plant?

S: Yes.

R: They did good. They did better. Even in that they hired minorities, black guys, women, Spanish people, Spanish speaking people, and so forth. They hired them in, but oftentimes they placed a greater scrutiny on those folks than they did on anybody else.

Because of that that old cliché came into play. The last to get hired is the first to get

fired. ~~I know for a fact that I was the third.~~ ^{ON AUG 3} In 1970 they hired more black people on that

day than they hired ^{NEED} any other day during that time. Because it was ~~something~~ ^{ALL THE EMPLOYEES} ~~can't~~ ^{THEY WOULD FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME, THEREFORE THE BEST SENIOR} remember exactly what it was, but they were being very selective. ~~On that day, the last~~ ^{DATES WERE ALREADY ESTABLISHED.} ~~day that they had to do it, that's when they hired a lot of the people.~~ I have friends today

that are working out at the plant with that hire date. Most of them are black. Again I say they have their little ways of doing things.

S: Did you think towards your retirement that the numbers kind of evened out? Were they a lot better than when you first got there?

R: I think what happened was a different rule came into play. General Motors, for the longest time they were not hiring. The best they were doing was hiring temporary people to keep them for less than ninety days. Even if they went beyond ninety they could not acquire seniority. Then the union said, "You're going to hire minorities. You're going to hire inner city people, and so forth, and so on." They did that, but keep in mind that they could not acquire seniority either. It's a difference in giving a man a fish, but if you teach him to fish he'll be around for a while. [Laughter]. This is what they were doing then.

When they did start hiring it was mostly only employees' children, relatives, and recommendations from employees. Therefore they knew that they were being scrutinized very closely. They did it. They hired better as far as races. Even then they cheated, and they were caught cheating. By them being caught cheating they had to go back and hire some people that they should have hired before. They were caught at it. [Laughter].

S: I think we covered a lot. Is there anything that I left out that you think would be important?

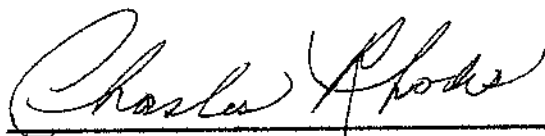
R: No, you were pretty thorough in the questions that you asked. I guess if I was going to put any emphasis on anything as far as the union is concerned, it's that we have a lot to be thankful for. We get a lot of benefits because of the union. That's a two-bladed sword. It's not just because of the union. There wouldn't be any union if it wasn't for management. The two of them have to work together, and because they have come to

work better, then the employees and I believe the corporation is blessed by it. However, as long as there's union and management, both of them are going to have to be honest and upfront. If the union person isn't doing what he gets paid to do and he's coming out there to make trouble instead of parts, then he needs to be told about that. The union needs to stand up and say, "No, we're not here to violate anybody's rights. We're here to protect your rights. It seems like to me you're violating them." When you get to where you can't tell a person that, when you're worried about getting reelected and everything, you're not doing them any good or the company.

S: Right, right. I agree with that a hundred percent. I think we covered almost everything on here. We're done.

R: All right.

I HAVE READ AND EDITED THE INTERVIEW AND, BY MY SIGNATURE,
INDICATE THAT IT IS APPROVED.



SIGNATURE



DATE