

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Unemployed Steelworkers Project

Sheet & Tube Company

O. H. 588

JAMES WILLIAMS

Interviewed

by

Mary K. Schulz

on

February 12, 1981

JAMES L. WILLIAMS

James L. Williams was born August 25, 1917, a son of John F. and Margaret Evans Williams, in Youngstown, Ohio. He grew up in Struthers, Ohio and graduated from Struthers High School in 1935.

Mr. Williams began his forty-four year career with the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company in 1935. He served with the United States Army from May 1942 until January 1946. During World War II he served with the 86th Infantry throughout Europe and was awarded the Bronze Star for valor. After his discharge, he returned to the Youngstown Sheet & Tube and was employed in the Plant Protection Department until his retirement in August 1979.

Mr. Williams and his wife currently live in Struthers where he has been active in local politics. He served for eighteen years as Fourth Ward Councilman. He is now retired and spends his time reading and is especially interested in history.

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES WILLIAMS

INTERVIEWER: Mary Schulz

SUBJECT: Youngstown Sheet & Tube, Lykes Corporation,
steel production, unemployment

DATE: February 12, 1981

S: This is an interview with James L. Williams for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program regarding steelworkers by Mary Kay Schulz at 246 Wilson Avenue, Struthers, on February 12, 1981, at 10:30 a.m.

Mr. Williams, let's start by talking about your background and where you were born.

W: I was born in Youngstown, of course, at St. Elizabeth Hospital. My home at that time was on Seventh Street in Struthers. We moved from Seventh Street in Struthers to Maplewood, my Uncle Frank's house. I can remember my mother telling me about my two uncles who came to visit my dad. They were Irishmen and they were drunk all the time. So one day my dad went to work and when they went down to the bootleggers to get a bottle, she threw all their clothes out the window and locked the house up. They never did come back! From there we moved to Wilson Street in Struthers; then we moved to Creed Street. I was about six years old when we moved to Creed Street. That was our permanent home there. That was called "Dog Town" in those days.

S: Why was that?

W: Everybody who lived in the plat, they were Sheet & Tube employees with company owned houses. We were buying our home. They were company built homes and everybody had a dog. They were called "Dog Town" of course. The people living in the Youngstown-Poland Road area were called "Hunkie Town" and my wife now, she came from "Coke Alley," and there was "Pink Tea Hill," and "Homecrest." All these areas had their ethnic groups that lived there. They all got those names from there.

- S: I've heard of "Coke Alley" before, but this is the first I've ever heard of some of these others.
- W: Oh, yes, "Pink Tea Hill," that was all the big shots right down here. Of course, we had Nebo, named after Mr. Nebo over on the other side, and you were familiar with that. I never knew that Nebo came from the Bible until just a few years ago.
- S: Was your father from Struthers too?
- W: No, my dad came from Niles. He was a policeman for Sheet & Tube.
- S: Oh, he worked for Sheet & Tube also?
- W: He worked for twenty-seven years, then he got multiple sclerosis and had to quit. My mother is originally from Farrell, Pennsylvania. As a young girl she came over here to visit some of her cousins and met my dad and started a romance. They got married in St. John's Cathedral in Cleveland.
- S: Where did you go to school here in Struthers at a public school here in Struthers?
- W: I went to Lyon Plat School in Struthers and when St. Nicholas School opened up, my mother sent us there. I went to Struthers High School and graduated from there.
- S: What year did you graduate?
- W: 1935. Strangely enough, I was going to work for a year and make some money and be a history professor. You may think I'm conning you, but that is the God's truth. But my dad got multiple sclerosis and I had to keep the family because there was no pensions or anything at that time. So, my mother just gave an allowance and then came time for the Army. The draft board told me that either I had to go or my brother had to go and my brother had just turned eighteen. So I said that I would go. So I went in the Army in 1942 and six months later that draft board took him. There was that poor father of mine, helpless, my mother had to wash him and feed him and clean him.
- S: Were there just the two boys in your family?
- W: Yes, just two boys.
- S: Any girls? Do you have any sisters?
- W: Yes, I have my sister Tootsie. My dad would always call her Tootsie and Peg. Of course, Toots was married when I went into the Army. My sister Peg worked in the rod and wire at Sheet & Tube plant in Struthers.

S: During the war?

W: During the war. She married some soldier from this camp out there in Sharon, went to Missouri with him, then divorced him. I don't know what ever happened there. It was all when I was in the Army. She reminds me of an aunt I had. I had an Aunt June that was married eight times. When she was filing for her Social Security, she had to look up all of her husbands. She said to me, "Jim, there is some of them there that I didn't even remember." That was a woman though, God love her, I'll tell you. She drank, ran around, whored around; she did everything she wanted to do, and by God, she lived to be 76 years old and she enjoyed every day of her life. So sometimes, what the hell, you might as well do what you want to do, instead of what society wants you to do.

S: That's right. So what about your Army days? Where did you serve?

W: With the Army I was stationed at Ft. Hayes, Columbus. Because at that time I was on limited service because of eyesight. That time was so good for the GI. I missed so many reveilles that they sent me to the infantry in Texas. At Ft. Hayes we had hospital rations; that means that you have roast pork and chocolate cake, wonderful food. I would have stayed there forever if I could have. But because of my social life I missed too many reveilles and got shipped out.

S: What did you do while you were there?

W: I was in supply there, furnishing and equipping all the GI's in this area that went there. They were supplied with their clothing and then shipped off to various camps throughout the country. Then when I went down to Texas, all I got was cornpone and hominy grits and pork. Oh, God, all goat.

S: Things changed.

W: They sure did. They ran my behind off. Then I became a supply sergeant down there. So that was what it ended up. I was supply sergeant for practically all the four years. We went to Camp Cook, Camp Callan, Camp St. Luis Obispo. Then we shipped out of Camp Miles Standish in Massachusetts, went to Camp Old Gold, France and then we went all through Belgium, Holland, to get to Germany. That's where we did our fighting, in Germany. We didn't do any fighting in France or Belgium or Holland. Then there was the fear of Hitler setting up his last ditch campaign in Bavaria; that is, what do they call that, "The Eagle's Nest?" [Bertchesgader] It was his summer home in Bavaria.

S: Oh, yes, I know.

W: That's where we went down to Austria. From Austria we came back

to Mannheim and Verhaim, and back to Camp Old Gold and home. We were the first division to come home intact. But Jim (me) got drunk in Philadelphia and missed the train. I never got my picture in the paper. Oh, was my mother worried. She knew what outfit I belonged to and everything. I came back for thirty days and went to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. We stayed there for about thirty days and we got shipped out to the Philippines. I was in the Philippines for about a year and I thought I would never get home. Four years!

S: That's a long time.

W: I remember we stayed at Camp Callan at San Diego, and I thought, "Oh God, Jim, you ought to stay here. This weather is so wonderful down here." I would have but everybody was here. Of course, dad had died in 1942, but my brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles are all here and I came back here. I did get cited for bravery in Germany, but that was about all. I never even got so much as a mosquito bite.

S: You were lucky.

W: Sure was. Now this poor fellow next door to me is dying of cancer. He got a kidney shot out of him when he was over in Germany, wonderful man. He goes up to the hospital one week out of every four for chemotherapy; he stays up there for over a week.

S: You got out of the Army what year? When the war was over?

W: Yes, when the war was over in 1946. I went back to work almost immediately.

S: You worked before you went into the Army?

W: Yes.

S: Where did you work then?

W: The Sheet & Tube. First, I started up in the seamless, which is still going now.

S: Was this straight out of high school then?

W: Yes, right straight out of high school. I lost a week's work and my dad could not understand that. Times were sill hard. He took me and my best friend that I had since the first year of school, Frank Sole, down to see the general manager down at Sheet & Tube. Word came back that I would be hired but Frank wouldn't. It wasn't until years and years later that we found out because his dad had communist ties when he was a young man. Of course, at that time, anyone who disagreed with his employer was labeled a Communist. The Italians were more or less

discriminated against. They kept searching for something too. But they wouldn't give Frank a job so he got one at Republic. Right before the war, he applied for a job in the U.S. Mail, and before he was called, the Army got him. He went with the Air Corps, all through the China-India Theatre. He came back and they didn't call him; they went right around him. Frank had to go up and fight over it.

S: You mean the post office?

W: Yes. The post office wouldn't hire him for some reason or another. I never did find out why there, but they did finally hire him. And he just retired here maybe six or eight months ago. He had been the chief personnel officer for the whole district. He was very intelligent.

S: You worked how long at the Sheet & Tube before you went into the Army?

W: Let's see, 1935 to 1942, seven years.

S: In the seamless?

W: No, I worked four years in the seamless and at that time, times were tough. The Depression was really still on. I had to keep the family going and I wasn't getting any time; I wasn't making any money. So, I decided to go down and see the superintendent of the plant protection--my dad's old job with the department. I went down and asked him for a job. He said, "Well, I don't know. Maybe tomorrow, maybe next week, maybe next year; I can't promise you anything." I no sooner got home, they called me up and told me to start to work that afternoon. I stayed there for the rest of the time.

S: And that was how long?

W: That was 35 years there, 44 years all together.

S: Forty-four years of Sheet & Tube. That's a long time.

W: Yes. It was a good company, really a good company.

S: During those years when you said it was tough, was production pretty slow? When you say you didn't get enough time, wasn't the work available and so you only worked a certain amount of days?

W: Yes, and then too, I was a young man and was very independent, even though I had dependents to keep. But there was no union at that time. If you bought the boss a drink after work, you worked. If you bought the boss a bag of tomatoes, you worked. Of course, Old Jim (me) didn't do things like that and he didn't work. I was one of the first to join the union in the seamless.

But, of course, when I got the job in the plant protection, there was no union there.

S: Was there ever a union? I mean, sooner or later there was a union.

W: Oh, yes. Later on we had our own independent union and then we joined the C.I.O. Steelworkers Union. I am sure glad because a pension after 44 years is pretty nice.

S: I'll bet it is. Can you remember, by any chance, when you first started working at the Sheet & Tube seamless what you made an hour, a week, or whatever?

W: Yes. At that time labor wages were 37½¢ an hour. But I started out at 60½¢ an hour because I got in the inspection department. They gave you that increase because there was no bonus; that was just straight time. So 60½¢ an hour is what I made.

S: That was considered pretty good for those times.

W: It was considered pretty good money. 37½¢ an hour, that was terrible. I think that after first strike, they got a 4¢ an hour raise or something like that, everybody, which wasn't much.

S: No. Over the years, what kind of changes did you see come about just in general. I realize that you weren't working in the steel mill itself, or were you? Did you in your job work the gates or . . .

W: I worked the gates most of the time. It wasn't too long until I came back from the Army that I got a supervision part in our department, which meant that I had the whole district to travel.

S: Now you are talking about plant protection?

W: Plant protection, yes.

S: You were in plant protection before you went to the service?

W: No, I beg your pardon. No, I was in plant protection before I got into the service. I was, I think, about three years in plant protection when I went into the service. I was at the gates at that time, patrolling that gates. Then after the war, I went back and frankly, I was only one of the few young men to be in the department when I was hired at the time in that department. Everybody else was very, very old. When I came back from the service, practically all of them were retiring or dying, and I moved up quite rapidly. I think mostly it was because the superintendent and my dad had been very good friends, and possibly not due too much to my ability. I did have quite a bit of Army training by then, which they liked. They did

like my dad. My dad really paved my way throughout the whole Sheet & Tube. He was well known and well liked and that means a lot.

I did see a lot of changes. I saw the seamless mills change over to the American system from the German system. I saw new strip mills go in and modernize. The whole Sheet & Tube, I think, was modernized about three times while I was there with new equipment. Then, of course, when Lykes took over, they took all of our capital with them. I was the only politician in the valley. At that time I was the Fourth Ward Councilman. I was the only politician in the whole valley that protested the Lykes takeover of the Sheet & Tube. Not anybody else, not one, said a word. I tried to get formal resolutions passed in the city council down in Struthers and the other councilmen refused to have anything passed on floor.

S: Why do you think that was?

W: They were afraid of the company. Most of them were Sheet & Tube employees and they were all bucking all the time. Of course, by that time I was all bucked out; I just didn't care then. I did and I remember one time the union paper mentioned the fact that no politicians had questioned the Lykes takeover. I wrote them a letter and told them about what I did and they came out with the next edition acknowledging that I did. I kept all that stuff and after a while you throw it away. Like all the letters and stuff from eighteen years as councilman, who cares?

S: You never know.

W: Yes. Like when I got in, the Fourth Ward came to about the next street over. During my eighteen years, the darn ward doubled in size to where I was half the city. Fifth Street up here was just a country road. I had it widened, curbed, sidewalked, and then the plaza came in, but who knows that today?

S: That's right.

W: I know my kids don't even give a damn. Like the half million dollar sewers that were going through here, I got that so that we could develop all the area up in there. Otherwise we couldn't on account of the drainage.

S: So a lot of community work really goes unnoticed, and a lot of times you can put into that type of thing and all you ever hear is what goes wrong.

W: Honest to God, Eleanor says I never saw the kids grow up because I was gone all the time. But frankly, I was the only politician at that time that really was doing anything; it was always here. Everybody walked street lights; they wanted fire hydrants; they wanted their streets paved; they wanted sidewalks and then water

problems; they would fight about the utilities. I still write letters to the editor to get it out of my system.

- S: That's good. Describe what the mill was like in its heyday, why it really was at its top production. I don't know if those years differ from time to time, but in the 1960's, I guess, it was really pretty much at its peak.
- W: Well, I can say one thing, they were happy days because everybody was happy. They were all making money; they were all working. There are some employees that slack off.
- S: Did you see a change in the employees in the type of worker over the years from when you first began until now? Do you think the older employee had more of a sense of responsibility or hard worker than . . .
- W: They were, yes. The older employee was a harder worker because at that time there were no unions and the boss was strictly the boss. If he didn't like you, you were fired. Even after that, the older men were, of course, more reserved and they did work. There was nobody crazier than me in my younger days when I was down there at the Sheet & Tube. These young men, though, after a while get married, and they have children and they are the same as the men before them. And the next generation coming up, they are the same way--crazier than hell, and all they think about is goofing around and making money, and running around. But then too, they settle down, they marry and have children, or even just get older. I can honestly say that in those years I was down there, in my type of work too--so many ethnic groups, and that includes Negro, which were very maligned against--I can honestly say that I didn't dislike one person. But, of course, except my superintendent; we got a new superintendent that I didn't get along with, but I just asked for a reduction and got away from him. Because he and I would have come to blows if we had stayed together, so I just left him. Maybe he is the closest one I can say that I ever disliked down there. But as far as the workers themselves, everybody treated me fine as far as I know. I might be unusual in saying that.
- S: You started talking about your job before. Exactly what were your responsibilities? What did your job entail?
- W: My job mostly as supervisor was entailed to supervise the men at the gates and the men at the mill, to see if they produced. Their work entailed them to watch for safety conditions, what would injure the men--Men not observing safety rules, and of course, stealing, the big thing. Later on our department got into drugs, which they tell me now, they have our new station firmly down at the coke plant as one of the drug problems, but that is since my time.
- S: But this whole time, you stayed at the Campbell Works?

- W: Yes, then I was promoted to fire chief for the whole district. They told me I had to take it or else, and I hated that job with a passion. I could never be a fireman. And, of course, that was our heyday too. That was in the 1960's. Everything was going full blast. I'm telling you, I was called out four and five times a week from home to put out the fires at the mill. Even today when that phone rings, I just go crazy. I hated that job. Finally I told them to stick it. That's when I left and went back to the gates.
- S: Oh, you did?
- W: Yes, and I am kind of glad too. Let's see, that was in 1962 and I retired in 1979. It was seventeen more years, wasn't it? All that time I was back under the union again. If I would have stayed fire chief, I would have been gone long ago.
- S: Oh really?
- W: Yes. When they first started reducing the forces because I had the time to go--I was in long enough to get a pension--they would have forced me to go. So I stayed in and completed my 44 years. Then when we had this hassle to shut the place down, somehow the union and the company got together with the employment office and I don't know how they got the agreement together with them and the unemployment bureau, but they told me, I would be 62 in a few months, if I would retire, I would be able to go for T.R.A. for eighteen months, my pension and social security. Well, T.R.A. amounts to \$536 every two weeks.
- S: That's a sizeable amount.
- W: That is \$1,072 every month for eighteen months. On top of my social security and on top of my Sheet & Tube pension, we had more money than we ever had.
- S: So for you, it had kind of a positive . . .
- W: That was the only time I think I ever got a good break. I got out at the right time.
- S: Would you have retired at 62 had this shutdown not come, or would you have worked longer?
- W: I think I would have worked longer?
- S: Do you?
- W: Yes. Because I had a pleasant job and nobody was hassling me. My supervisors were all fine people and the men I worked with were fine people and the job was a good, pleasant job. In fact, I read about five hours of eight. Nobody bothered me and I was in a position where I could do my job and read. I loved that job.

In fact, I did that only for that purpose. But I would have stayed I think.

S: Well, you are a young man yet.

W: Yes, another factor that might have been also is that I did have a heart attack and my job did entail getting me out in the weather. I find myself very short winded with this kind of weather. I had that darned heart attack and quit smoking. I got myself a pot belly.

S: Would you have any choice if you decided you didn't want to retire? Could they have put you somewhere else? Could you have been transferred or did they give you no choice or did that go along seniority lines?

W: No, that was all strictly seniority.

S: If you would have wanted to work a few more years, could you have gone to Brier Hill or someplace else?

W: Well, my job was working. My job still worked.

S: Oh, it was?

W: Yes. My job was working when I left.

S: But you really chose to base your retirement on the benefits attached to it, the T.R.A., the supplemental things?

W: Yes. I was going to retire very shortly, but I had it in mind but my mind hadn't been made up. The pressure was starting to get awfully bad with the younger people. Even me going wouldn't have kept them on their jobs. But it got so that after a while the men in the department just couldn't stand me because I had seniority and I had the years.

S: Do you mean you got the feeling they felt you should retire because to make room for somebody else?

W: Oh sure, to make room for somebody else. Hell, when they started cutting, I think they only had about eight or nine people left; they had sixty some before. My staying or going wouldn't make that much difference with the huge majority of them. But everybody was jockeying. In fact, our union president is Walter Swierz, the mayor's assistant in Youngstown, a very bright person. He's going to succeed in that job up there too. He's the one that made the arrangements for my T.R.A.

S: Now were you in the mill the day the shutdown happened, September 19, 1977? The real "Black Monday" I guess is what they called it.

W: Yes, in fact, I was working day turn and it was just a stunned

feeling; everybody was just stunned. Of course, I was working in the area where we knew the seamless people would keep working and I was working in an area that serviced the seamless. So, our particular area wasn't too bad. People just didn't talk too much about it; they were just more or less stunned. Of course, I wrote another letter to the Vindicator on that. That's when Mitchell permitted the merger of the Lykes and the Sheet & Tube. Of course, I blamed it on politics.

S: You did?

W: Well, here's the Lykes people down there in New Orleans and I mentioned this in the letter; here's Senator Long, one of the most powerful senators in the country and here i Nixon. Of course, with that triumvirate, why, nobody up here could get any information on the union. What Lykes wanted was our money. I think we had about \$200,000,000 at that time in liquid assets, but all they wanted to do was get that. They bought a bank, and they bought an insurance company. Then I think they fixed up some of their boats with Sheet & Tube and with taxpayers money. It didn't cost them anything from my viewpoint. So their boats are highly subsidized by the taxpayer. I think it was a deal between Nixon and Mitchell and Long and Lykes to get that merger. But how can a small company like Lykes, I know it has been done before, swallow a monster like Sheet & Tube without those people helping them. Now Lykes ended up being one of the chief stockholders in LTV.

S: What did you see as their role, the Youngstown Sheet & Tube owners at that time? Do you think they really had a choice or do you think they really were kind of forced in a corner to sell or to merge rather?

W: I could never really fathom what was going on, but I do remember one time I was up the Maennerchoir (a German club). I don't think I've been to the Maennerchoir more than three times in my life. I was up there this night, and as my position in Sheet & Tube plant protection, I knew all the big shots and I looked over in the corner and there was Glossbrenner who used to be president of Sheet & Tube, and Rovert Williams, the president of Sheet & Tube that day. They sat over in that corner with a pitcher of beer and they talked and talked and talked. Now nobody could say what their role was. He would never say, never get a statement out of him that I can remember. In fact, nobody around the company would make any statements to the guy. I can't remember any statements and I was really hip on that. I tried to follow that closely. What their tactics were, I don't know, except they offered the stockholders and the bondholders the premium when they sold out to . . . Then they paid them with our money.

S: Did you see a change right away in the mill itself after the

merger?

- W: Yes, I think that was the time then right after the word came out, things started going downhill rapidly. You couldn't get any supplies, no parts. I'm quoting the maintenance people because I wasn't in any position to know. These people would complain about they couldn't get their machines fixed; they couldn't get cranes fixed; they couldn't get rolls fixed. Actually, if we didn't have a good machine shop at that time, I think things would have deteriorated more rapidly. We had some of the best craftsmen in the world, in the Sheet & Tube; now they are scattered all over the country. They would make the parts instead of purchasing them. But people just started getting to the point where they didn't care much what was going on. They figured their fate had been decided and they were just going to ride it out. But it was a shame, especially when we started getting a lot of women in there too. I often remarked when I was a young man, they started hiring women in the Sheet & Tube and then I went into the Army. Four years I came back and the women were gone. Now, I got to be an old man and they were hiring the younger women again and I was going. And then they went.
- S: So you think kind of the attitude of the workers changed too after the merger?
- W: I think so, yes. Just, "Who gives a damn?"
- S: People I've talked to seemed to have had a really good sense of loyalty with Youngstown Sheet & Tube when it was Youngstown Sheet & Tube and locally owned. They really seemed to have that loyalty to the company; they thought it really was a good company. Do you think most of the workers felt that way?
- W: I do think so. It sounds strange in this day of high finance and big companies and conglomerates and that, but I think the men of the Sheet & Tube had a deep sense of loyalty toward the company; even the top supervisors did also. There wasn't such a thing as constantly moving top supervision around. Usually they came in and they stayed. Even that plant protection department of ours, which was one of the lowest paid down there, we had very little movement as far as leaving for better jobs. There were a lot of good jobs down there. When you were in production, the open hearth furnace, those blast furnaces and the strip mills, they paid real good money, excellent money. It seemed like we always seemed to work better than the steel mills around us.
- S: Why do you think?
- W: I don't know. Maybe that wasn't true; maybe it was just our idea. It seems to me as a rule we did better; we worked steadier than the steel industry as a whole. Of course, we made the best

pipe in the world as seamless tube up there, I would say in all honesty that you would find anyplace. I used to work at the gates and these huge trucks would come out carrying those 40 to 45 foot lengths. Boy you could look at that and they would be all shiny and glossy and straight as a die. Those men were craftsmen. You would hear them over at the taverns, honest to God; they hated their jobs. They hated their bosses; they hated everything. And all they could talk about was their jobs; that's all they could talk about. As the old saying goes, "There is more steel rolled over in the tavern than there is in the strip mills." Well, the English language is the great uniter. You get in a bar and everybody no matter what ethnic group you are, you speak English and they talk over their jobs; they talk over their problems. There were some workers up there, they would get good turns out and the next guy would come on and he would do the very same job and he would have a bad turn. But they wouldn't tell each other their secrets, no, they wouldn't tell each other the secrets. You had to learn it for yourself. Sometimes you just turn a little screw, an inch or so. But they were jealous of their jobs and they were proud about their jobs. Yes, proud of their company too. That was a sin what happened.

S: Did you see it coming? Do you think most men really saw it coming?

W: Not in the shape it happened. I think that they sensed, at least I did, that you get some of these strangers running your company and you know they are part of huge conglomerates and the history of big business being what it is, you are kind of weary of what's going on; you've been hesitant; the kind of suspicion that times aren't going to be as good in the future as they were in the past. Now, I see Reagan is going to de-emphasize white collar crime and go after crimes of violence. But that's all right too, but we are going to get back to days of big steel, big chemical companies doing just what they want to do, without fear of anything. I've got a New Republic magazine in there now--an article about the crimes all these companies have committed in the last couple of years. Nobody goes to jail; they get fined, but nobody goes to jail. You know darn well it's got to be men who make those decisions.

S: So you don't think anyone really thought they would actually shut down the way they did, maybe a slow down but not really a . . .

W: If there was going to be a shutdown, of course, we've had departments shut down before, shut down completely. The rod mill went down. They shut down the rod mill, the nail mill, the electric weld, and never started them up again. It was hard to understand. They shut down the nail mill down at the rod and wire because of lack of business and U. S. Steel

was opening up a new nail mill. I never could figure that out. They figured if something was going to happen it wouldn't be their department that shut down, not their department, maybe somebody else's.

S: Do you think the company should have given these men more warning that this was coming rather than all at once?

W: I think it would have been fair if they would have because I'll tell you frankly, when the shutdown came, the Sheet & Tube was going full blast. They were working six days a week, seven days a week, all kinds of overtime. Everything was going full blast, and all of a sudden, Bam! The shutdown came. No warning, no nothing.

S: Do you think there were other causes besides the merger in Lykes and draining off the assets and so forth? Do you think just the economic situation or government restrictions or EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], do you think all that kind of contributed?

W: No, I don't.

S: Don't you? You think they could have survived?

W: They could have survived because, look at here, we've got Sharon Steel and we have the Republic in Warren, and we have Copperweld up there in Warren that makes specialty steel. It's a huge company; France just bought it; it's a famous Jewish banking firm. They own banks in England and France and were in Germany, Austria; well anyway, they bought this company. But they are all land bound; they all would have the same problems as Sheet & Tube would have. They are all healthy and growing stronger and stronger. They all have the same problems with the government and the EPA and with the freight charges. It's hard to figure out.

I noticed through the years that companies don't fail because of the unions or the government. It is to management usually that ruins a company. That has happened through our history that top management has ruined companies, wrong decisions. Just like I read in the paper today where Ohio Edison gets another raise in their rates because they are not going to build four nuclear plants that they thought they had needed. But we have to pay for what has been done so far. Not that is management's decisions. We have to pay. It should be the stockholders that pay for them; they own the company, not the customer. But management has always been at fault in my opinion. The union and the worker have never ruined a company. Look what Chrysler employees are doing now. They are giving up millions and millions of dollars worth of benefits and the problem with Chrysler was not the employees, it was the management. That was Ford's problem too. You can blame all this

problem, I think, on management--tried to make the American public buy big cars and they didn't want it.

S: When a company like Sheet & Tube pulls out of an area the way they did, do you think steel companies or any big companies have a responsibility to the community? Where do you think their responsibility lies? Say Campbell, for instance, and Struthers, their tax base really came from the Campbell Works. Do you think the company owes that community?

W: Well, they provide a job for you and they pay you and they maintain that's all they owe you and maybe that is true. But communities will build roads to sustain heavy traffic; they will endure smoke, stench, for the sake of their tax base; and the companies, without a question, don't put into the community as much as they take out. I can remember years ago when we had a snow like we had last night, well, the next morning you would look out and the snow would be black. Now, you don't deserve to live in a community like that when there are ways to clean up the air. If there isn't, it's a different story, but there are ways to clean up the air and the water and everything. I feel the companies should be made to do it. Because, after all, who pays the bill but us, the customer.

An example was when they were building the Southern Park Mall out there. The county commissioners authorized new roads all around that mall. Notice all those roads, how wide they are, big and beautiful. Well, that was to accommodate DeBartolo and his mall. The money they spent out there, they took off of the other communities. For the next few years, they couldn't do any road work because they spent all their money out there for him. I'm glad it's out there, don't get me wrong, but he should have paid for all of that. Here in Struthers, if you wanted a road improved, you had to pay for it because the city won't do it for nothing. I've seen cities spend money for the companies and they owe it to the community to at least warn them if something is going to happen. The schools are the one that take the brunt of it on the property tax.

S: When this first happened there was really a kind of a panic type feeling. Now that it has been a few years and looking back, do you think the area has been affected as much as the people originally thought?

W: I don't know. People have seemed to accommodate to the whole thing. Of course, everyone close to me is still working. My son-in-law works up at the seamless; my nephew is still working down at the Sheet & Tube or LTV or whatever you want to call it; everyone close to me is still working. So it didn't affect me that much except my son here isn't working, but the job he quit is still working. With the company shut down, Sheet & Tube is still working. With the job he quit,

he would have made \$30,000 last year. But they earn it; they work like dogs.

S: There are still parts of the mill that are working?

W: Yes, our Cold Drawn up at Brier Hill; the seamless and the shipping. We are also shipping small pipe out. They ship us from Aliquippa to here, then they ship it out here to someplace else with their orders. Of course, the coke plants will be the money-maker. From the last I heard, they were getting \$145 a ton for coke. It must be more than that now. But somebody tells me that our coke yard down there is fenced in and there is a sign on it "Property of Sharon Steel". So, I haven't been down there to look at it, down at Struthers. We had a huge coke yard right there by the main road. But Sharon Steel doesn't have a coke plant; this would be a good place to get their coke. So, I don't know what that means down there.

S: In the beginning, there was a lot of talk of the workers buying the plants and trying to run them themselves and then there was Ecumenical Coalition. Do you think that type of thing gave people false hopes or do you think they really and truly believed they could pull it off so to speak and get the mills running again?

W: I honestly think it could have been done. We still have all of our skilled people in this valley. We still have all of our skilled managers in this valley. It seems awfully strange we can give billions of dollars to foreign aid and the billions upon billions of dollars spent on the Vietnam War, which ended as useless and not worth a damn, and they couldn't give us \$300,000,000 to keep this place going. At that time, yes, because we had all our skilled people still here. Now, I would say it would be very difficult because they are scattered all over the place. But I really feel the rest of the steel industry in connivance with the federal government, didn't want that to happen; they didn't want a viable steel plant in this area.

S: Why?

W: The less competition you have, the better position you are in to keep your prices up and that seems to be the name of the game today, to keep the prices up. That is one of the reasons we have high prices today because they are afraid price controls will go on and they will be stuck with a low price if they didn't. Maybe it sounds like the Dark Ages by the way I am talking, but maybe it has been that I have read so much in my lifetime about the ills of big business and management, corruption of government. Maybe if I hadn't read so much I wouldn't have that attitude but I know it could be done. Those decisions could have quickly been done at Wall Street offices and the state houses and the capital.

- S: It really affects a lot of people's lives, changes a lot of life styles.
- W: I was lucky to get the T.R.A. because old Reagan is going to cut it out. He figures there is too much T.R.A., well maybe there is. Why should the government pay T.R.A. from the mistakes the government has made?
- S: Well, if you look at it from that way, I can say that.
- W: Yes. If foreign imports have hurt various countries, raise the tariff then. But they won't do it. There are just too many angles in all this business, angles that I will never know.
- S: Do you think in general the benefits were good to the man who did lose his job in that shutdown? Do you think that what they offered him was fair?
- W: I never gave much thought for somebody else. I always thought I was, but I was more fortunate. Now, I do have a nephew by marriage, a first-class welder and top worker, very skilled and energetic worker. There isn't a craftsman there that can't get a job no place. He is working with the street department for Boardman right now under the CETA Program.
- S: Would he leave the area if he could?
- W: I don't know. His wife's mother told me once that he did have an opportunity to get a job but his wife wouldn't leave the area. She is a mother's girl. She and her mother are very close, like my wife and I talked it over if I had lost my job and had to go someplace else she would have to go with me. It's tough to pick up your roots and go, but by God, you have got to go where you can make a living.
- S: Why do you think people in this area seem to be reluctant to move? People seem to have a very strong feeling about staying here.
- W: I can speak for myself and I think that the reason is this area is a potpourri--I hope that's the right word--of all the nationalities of the world. When these first generations came over here, they came over here because they had no land and no homes and they had to have a better life. They came over here, got jobs in steel mills, got a few bucks ahead, bought a home, bought land, raised their families. I think it is the family instincts that are still in this valley; the close-knit families that make people want to stay here. They have their churches; they have their parochial schools; they have close ties to public schools and they have their mothers and their fathers and their uncles and their aunts. I think their children pick up that same feeling that the first and second generation people have. They just want to be part of this area. This area belongs to them. Of course,

the state belongs to them; the country belongs to them. I think that it's family ties that hold them close here.

Look at my wife and I. She was born and raised here; I was born and raised here. Like I said, I moved two blocks away from my mother and my daughter moved two blocks away from me. She's up here every day practically and the kids stop every day coming home from school. I can remember when Judy graduated from St. Nicholas School. She wanted to go to Mooney. By that time I had lost my job down there, my supervisor's job, and I said, "No, she has go to go to Struthers High School." She cried and raised cane. I said, "Hey, I went there, your mother went there. It's a good school. We had close ties." So finally she went. Within a week she was running the class. She loved every day of it.

S: What do you think the future is for the valley here as far as steel making is concerned?

W: I think we will always have steel making in this valley. I understand now that they are getting ready to put some electric furnaces in where the old open hearths are down there. One thing is that this area is a large steel consuming area. It pays to make steel here to a certain extent. Of course, we don't have the huge consuming area that the Chicago area has you might say. We are heavily populated; we are close to the eastern seaboard; we consumed a lot of steel, not nearly like we did before. Some of those new furnaces that Sharon Steel is putting out there can knock off in six to eight hours a ninety ton heat. Of course, that was a long, long time ago, before they did improve the furnaces.

S: Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we really didn't touch upon, nothing in general?

W: No, I think we covered everything pretty well. Well except with being a good Democrat. I'm kind of discouraged with the administration's ideas, but we'll have to wait and see.

S: Let's talk about that a little bit. What about Carter's role in this when the 5,000 were all laid off that one day. Do you think he handled it the right way or do you think he should have . . . As you said, if we spent money for Vietnam and everything else, do you think he should have been a little more committed?

W: Of course. I am committed to this area; I feel that we were cheated. His Attorney General Bell did the very same thing that Nixon's Attorney Mitchell did. Would permit no access to any of the records, give out no information on the new merger of LTD and Lykes. I don't think Carter, in that area, did any better than Nixon did or what Ford would have done. It was very disappointing to me that he was like he was on that.

But again, like I say, the powerful people down there in Washington, you think the president is powerful, but there are other powerful people in Washington, especially the high-class Washington attorney firms down there. They really run Washington.

S: Thank you for this interview. If you feel you want to add anything to it later on just give me a call.

W: If you can think of anything, just give me a call.

END OF INTERVIEW